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THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES B. BAYNARD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.

CHAPTER I.

REUBEN CROCK BIDS THE RECTOR "NOT BE
AFRAID."

OXBURY is one of the quietest and most prosaic towns in the whole country. There is a market-place, very sleepy-looking, and bare on six days of the week, and only exhibiting a little mild excitement when the cattle-market is held on the Thursdays. This tranquil space is enclosed on three sides by dull dwellings, built of horizontal boards overlapping each other. Then, to the west, there is a placid street, formed of similar cottages, and diversified by a few

respectable brick houses with green railings. This—Bridge Street—continues its uninteresting course to the railway station. To the east of the market-place there is High Street, with the ordinary tradesmen's shops, two or three manufactories, and a brand new pile of counting-houses. If we include some half-dozen modern villas at the eastern extremity of the town, and a couple of insignificant by-streets, we have noticed the whole extent of Oxbury.

The locality has two redeeming features, and those are the parish church and its quaint churchyard. Tradition indicates the latter as the last resting-place of a great Saxon king, who had been slain in defence of his crown, and whose body was conveyed hither from the battle-field by two monks from Oxbury Abbey, which he had founded and richly endowed. A portion of the ancient abbey still remains, and is used as the parish church. It stands on the south side of High Street. Passing down a shady retired space, you see at your right hand two flights of well-worn steps, and at the

top the grand Norman entrance. Opposite this is the Rectory.

Now Clement Maxforth was the Rector of Oxbury at the time our story begins. Everybody knows that the living was presented to him by his uncle, Mr. Angus Hartleby. The latter was now on a visit at the Rectory, and the two men were walking together on the lawn when the following conversation took place :

“It is a dreadful thing that he should have taken his own life,” said the Rector, who held a letter in his hand. Mr. Maxforth was a short and rather stout young man, with mild grey eyes and an ingenuous face, which now wore a somewhat troubled look.

“But you must consider,” said Mr. Hartleby, “that such events are very common just now. Ours may truly be termed the age of suicides. Your acquaintance, Talbot, of whose death you are informed in that letter, was one of a large number of reading men who have

become tainted by the views of our clever thinkers."

"I admit," returned the Rector, "that poor Talbot had been illuminated to the full extent of modern science; but the letter states that he had lately suffered several disappointments and bereavements, and that he was prostrated by them."

Mr. Hartleby seated himself upon a garden chair and replied :

"Misfortunes, Clem, are not phenomena of this present age alone. I think I experienced a few in my early days. But when I was young, men were not crushed and overborne by the cares of life, as they now are, even before they have made acquaintance with middle age. I want to know why you youngsters cannot take the rubs of life as your fathers did before you—feel them like men, but bear them like men also."

"But do you make sufficient allowance for the greater strain and pressure there is upon us in these times, and the increased

rapidity with which we work and live?" asked the Rector.

"I think I do," replied Hartleby; "but it is not that which does the mischief so much as the materialism which modern science has produced. See, for instance, how it deifies sagacity and shrewdness."

"Undoubtedly we should lean upon something higher than our own abilities," said the Rector. "A sense of dependence would ease the burden of failure, and give courage for another endeavour."

"The fact is," said Mr. Hartleby, "your acquaintance Talbot was a victim of the philosophers. He was taken captive by the fascinating style, and practice in arguing, shown by our able thinkers, who suggested to his mind doubts and difficulties which tended to make him first irreligious, and then miserable."

"But you surely do not quarrel with the facts of science," cried the Rector. "You would have those facts communicated, would you not?"

"Certainly; but I protest against the

bold, unproved, and therefore useless speculations whereby the communication of those facts is followed. If, instead of labouring to shake old beliefs, men of science were able to present a new system, good, bad, or indifferent, which they could prove to be true, they might be of service. But they do nothing of the kind."

"That," said the Rector, "is because the limits between the seen and the unseen are as insurmountable now by human faculties as they were in the earlier days of science."

Mr. Hartleby rose from the garden chair and began to pace to and fro upon the lawn in great agitation.

"Of all the unbelief that has been preached to the world," he cried, excitedly, "very little has come up to this of the end of the nineteenth century in its cruelly desolating tendency. I know it blighted the life of my unhappy son, whom I lost six years ago. Even paganism allowed men something; but our modern philosophers take away all—*all!*"

“Poor Talbot,” continued Mr. Hartleby, after a pause, and glancing at the letter which the Rector held in his hand. “Another hapless disciple gone! For a man like him, who, not being himself deeply read or exceptionally scientific, received, not the discoveries only, but the *speculations* of our sages, first as probabilities, and then as truths—for such a man I feel deep pity. And yet he would hardly have opened his mind to these pestilent doctrines had he not been sighing for some lightening of the chain which his former belief had imposed.”

“It is worth observing, I think,” said the Rector, “that ‘infidel’ speculations, although they all oppose Christian belief, are by no means in accordance one with another.”

“They are not, indeed. When I was young, the opponents of revelation were intense admirers of nature: the fashion now is to abuse her lustily. Well, the two schools cannot both be right; the universe cannot be at the same time very good and

very bad. One school therefore must be wrong."

"Perhaps they are both wrong," said the Rector; "but at all events the pessimists have told us nothing new, for we Christians have for ages been taught that the whole creation groans and travails in pain. Only I hope we make a better use of the truth than the philosophers do."

"Yes," returned Mr. Hartleby, with animation, "if the Christian's belief is vain, at any rate it is a truer friend to him than any of the theories of our thinkers can ever prove. The thinkers' disciples are giving their evidence upon the subject every day; they are moaning about the world's utter worthlessness; their cry of despair sounds pitifully in our ears, and some of them hurry themselves to the grave with violent hands, as Talbot has done."

"Without a doubt it is materialism that is taking the salt out of life, and leaving it but the vapid dregs," assented the Rector.

"Do you know, Clement," said Mr. Hartleby, "that you parsons are to blame

for allowing science to have its own way so much?"

"What would you have us do?" asked the Rector with a smile.

"Do? Why, most of you appear more eager to do battle with each other concerning articles of belief and forms of worship than to resist the common enemy who is seeking to overturn religion altogether."

"Oh! come, come!" said the Rector, laughing, "that is too much! Let us go and have a chat with Reuben Crock."

"Who is he?"

"That man there," replied Mr. Maxforth, looking towards a labourer, who, at some distance, was busily engaged in trimming the Rector's flower beds. "My regular gardener, you know, is laid up with rheumatism, and Reuben Crock is doing occasional duty in his place. You must know that Reuben is a dissenter," he continued, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes; "but he is an honest, straightforward man, nevertheless."

They walked up to the labourer, who

stood up, and touched his cap to the gentlemen.

“Well, Reuben,” said the Rector, “how are you getting on at the chapel?”

“Middlin’, sir,” returned the man, simply; “not so well as I could wish. I doubt we has troubles before us.”

“Troubles before you! I thought you had given an invitation to a new minister, and were going to make a fresh start?”

“Well, sir, you see, I doubt whether the new minister will come to Oxbury after all.”

“Indeed! Why not?”

“Because, after they had sent him the invitation, some of our big people altered their minds, and thought he wasn’t the man for us, and had better not come.”

“That is rather an awkward situation, is it not?” asked the Rector.

“It be, sir, I can assure you.”

“How long has your flock been without a shepherd, Reuben?” asked Mr. Hartleby.

“Goin’ on for two year, sir,” returned the man.

“That is a long time.”

"It be, sir. We have had a good many nice gentlemen on trial for the situation during that two year, sir; but first one didn't suit for the place, and then another didn't suit—the one that pleased some didn't please others, and our big people couldn't agree which they would choose, and so the time has passed."

"But you did agree about this one, did you not?" asked the Rector, with a smile.

"We did, sir—all but two or three. We had a regular church meetin', and it was put to the vote, and he was elected; so if he likes to come, of course no one can't hinder him. But I doubt he won't have the courage *now*."

"Then, some who voted for him have gone over to the other side since he received your invitation, it appears? I suppose the two or three original dissentients were some of your influential people, were they not?"

"That's how it was, sir; and they have brought the others round to their way of thinkin'; for the big people couldn't bear

to give in, even when the election was decided. A good many of us stick to what we have done, and will not go from our word and promise to him ; but there is very little spirit left in us to receive him, supposin' he does come. They do say he means to venture among us after all, and that he has sent a letter to the deacons to say so, but I hardly knows what to believe nowadays. We shall know all about it to-night."

"Shall you? Have you a meeting to-night, then?"

"Yes, sir; the deacons has called a church meetin', and we suppose they be goin' to read his letter to us."

"Well, Reuben, as a good churchman and Rector of the parish, I suppose I am not bound to wish your chapel any very great success; yet I am truly sorry to learn your affairs are in such a sad state."

"One thing seems very clear, Clement," said Mr. Hartleby, turning to the Rector, "the new minister, if he comes, will not empty the parish church."

“ My fears on that score have been quite removed,” returned Mr. Maxforth with a smile. “ You will not mind a little joke, Reuben ?”

“ No, sir ; not at all.”

“ It appears, from what you tell us, that I have no need to resort to new expedients in order to keep my congregation together—a few flowers in church, for instance, altar candles, and eucharistic vestments. No special attractions will be needed—no incense—no gorgeous ceremonial.”

“ I know you would never use them popish things, sir.”

“ You think I am sound and steadfast, do you ?”

“ Yes, sir ; and I say you have no call to be afraid if the new minister comes. You must keep a good heart, sir.”

“ I will try, Reuben. Meanwhile I presume you are somewhat anxious to know whether he is coming or not ?”

“ I be, sir ; me and my missis can think of nothin' else. We have been lookin' forward to this church meeting that is to be

held to-night for a good many days past. I do hope, sir, that my fears may not come true ; but, as I said before, sir, I doubt we has troubles before us."

CHAPTER II.

JOHANNA'S LETTER.

REUBEN CROCK, when he had finished his day's work in the Rectory garden, gathered up his tools, and started for home. It was rather late, for he had stayed of his own accord to do several trifling jobs that an ordinary labourer would not have considered necessary to the earning of his wages ; therefore as he passed out at the large iron gates, it was growing dusk, and the church clock warned him to make haste if he would be in time for the meeting. He hurried along, and soon reached his cottage in Bridge Street. On opening the door, he was told by his daughter that her mother had already gone, leaving word that he was

to follow her to the school-room with as little delay as possible. His tea stood on the little deal table, but Reuben, having washed and towelled himself vigorously in the back kitchen, and otherwise completed his toilet, quickly emerged from his home, leaving the meal untouched. He retraced his steps, and when he came nearly opposite the parish church, he turned northwards, and passed up a by-way called Grange Street. Here stands the chapel, its new spire uprearing itself to an elevation as great as that of its ancient neighbour. A row of cottages close at hand constitute the chapel property, duly vested in trustees for the benefit of the minister for the time being.

When Reuben reached his place of worship, the front gates were standing wide open, and, walking reverently along a path leading to the rear of the building, he stood for a moment, and listened at the school-room door. He knew he was very late, and that the meeting had begun long since ; therefore he was not surprised to hear the

voice of one of the church members within engaged in prayer. He waited until the sound had ceased, and then lifted the latch and stepped in quietly. The room was nearly full of men and women; but so intent were they upon the business about to be transacted that no one noticed him as he silently took his seat beside his wife.

At the farther end of the room, towards which every eye was now turned, sat the two deacons, one of whom, Mr. Gloss, occupied the chair, and was presiding over the meeting. This person now rose, and stated that his brethren were aware that the church at Grange Street had been for a considerable time in the situation of sheep without a shepherd. He need not tell them that several candidates for the vacant pulpit had appeared, and that there had been a great variety of opinions as to their respective merits. At length a young preacher had been heard who, with the exception of two or three families, had gained the suffrages of all the members; and an invitation had been sent to him to

take the pastoral oversight of the flock. He supposed it was generally known that the young minister's reply had been received by the deacons, and that the meeting was summoned on this particular evening in order that it might be read.

Reuben Crock at this part of the speech leaned forward eagerly, and held in his breath that he might not lose a single syllable that was spoken.

Mr. Gloss now produced and read the letter, from which the meeting learned these two facts, first, that Philip Holland accepted the call which the church had given him ; and secondly, that he purposed commencing his ministry among them on the Sunday after next.

The reading of that letter concluded the business, and soon afterwards the assembly began to disperse. It was evident that the young minister's announcements had excited no enthusiasm, but rather anxiety and sorrow in some cases, and in others positive dissatisfaction.

“ You see now what kind of man Mr.

Holland is," said one church member, in a contemptuous tone, as he moved slowly away upon a stick. "You should have followed my advice, friends, and not have invited so shallow a preacher, who has, you perceive, jumped at the offer of a hundred and twenty pounds a year."

The speaker, who was one of the original dissentients, was also a person of position and influence, and had once held offices in the church, but had resigned in disgust some years previously, and retired into "the cold shade of opposition." The deacons stood in some dread of his tongue, for ever since the interregnum commenced Mr. Stagers had been unsparing of his sneers at their administration. Moreover he was the acting trustee of the nice little property with which the church was endowed. He was an old man, with an abundance of silvery hair and a florid complexion which, like the picture of the Apostle Peter that Raphael showed to the cardinals, seemed to be blushing with shame to see the church so badly governed.

Mr. Holland having been recommended and supported by the deacons, his candidature had been throughout opposed by the acting trustee, who, as we have seen, had done his best, but in vain, to prevent the invitation being given.

Mr. Stagers having departed with a grim, cynical expression upon his countenance, the rest of the church members, passing out of the room, grouped themselves in the cool shade of a row of lime trees growing by the side of the chapel, discussing the contents of the letter and Mr. Holland's prospects with that fervour and self-absorption which, when an event of general interest has occurred, characterise people whose neighbourhood is usually barren of incidents.

"He ought to have taken more time to consider the matter," said an old lady, frowning severely, and shaking her head. "So important a step as settling in the ministry requires more than a day or two to decide about."

"So it does, sister," assented another.

“It is ridiculous to tell us he has made it the subject of consideration at all. He has done no such thing; and I am extremely sorry he has made up his mind to come—aren’t you, Mr. Flint?”

The individual addressed was the co-partner of Mr. Gloss in the deaconate. Tall, squarely built, his face indicating firmness and decision of character, Mr. Flint, like many others credited with these qualities, sometimes belied his reputation.

“I am,” he replied; “in fact I have written to him, telling him I think he will do well to reconsider his purpose.”

“Then *I* think you were ill-advised,” said a man who had not yet spoken. “Did not you and Mr. Gloss both support Mr. Holland when he was here?” he asked with some warmth.

“Well, yes, Mr. Larberry, we did,” replied the deacon, in a hesitating manner.

“And did he not accept our call in the belief that you both wished him to settle among us?”

“Very likely.”

Mr. Larberry turned upon his heel, muttering, "such conduct is disgraceful! The deacons have changed sides because they were afraid of Mr. Staggers! I will tell you what we must do, friends," he continued, joining a small group who had the appearance of being leaders of opinion; "Mr. Staggers, I regret to say, has been writing to the young man, abusing him for accepting the invitation, and threatening I don't know what in case he ventures to come to Oxbury. And here is Mr. Flint, who should have known better—he has been writing discouraging things to him also; and two or three other persons have fallen into the same mistake. Now listen to me. Let each of us write Mr. Holland a letter, showing what I believe is the fact, viz., that the general feeling is still in his favour, and begging him to come. I shall do so, for one. Look at that chapel-house," he exclaimed, pointing to the minister's residence close by, its shutters closed, and the evergreens and flowers in the front garden looking drooping and neglected.

"That house," said Larberry, "has been uninhabited for nearly two years, and I, for one, shall rejoice when Mr. Holland enters it, and it shows signs of life again! Mrs. Crock, what say you? Mr. Copperfox, what is your opinion?"

Mr. Copperfox spoke first.

"Brother Larberry," said he, "I had just been making the very same suggestion to our friends here, a moment before you joined us!"

Reuben Crock's wife, a stout, comely woman, whose utterances carried great weight with the community at Grange Street, then declared *her* opinion.

"What you have now said, Mr. Larberry, ought to be acted upon by each on us whose heart is in the right place. As the sayin' is, 'One foe is too many, and a hundred friends too few.' "

This observation was received with marks of approval by the bystanders, and several persons asked, "What is Mr. Holland's address?"

"Mr. Holland," replied Larberry, with

suave dignity, "completed his studies at college some months ago. He is now staying at his father's house, Hampton Street, Davenstone." And with these words the church members dispersed to their several homes.

The next morning Larberry wrote his letter, and having read it over to his wife, for he prided himself somewhat upon his literary talents, he started for the post-office. In High Street he encountered Mrs. Crock, who was just emerging with a basket upon her arm from an entry. Larberry at once divined that the benevolent dame had been carrying some dainty to a sick child living down that court.

"Ah! Mrs. Crock," he said, "I find you are not yet tired of doing good."

"Why should I be?" she asked. "They are but trifles I give away. I sow with the hand, and not with the whole sack, as the sayin' is."

"See," said Larberry, holding up the letter; "I am sending this to Mr. Holland."

“I am glad of that,” was Mrs. Crock’s rejoinder, and the sparkling of her eyes attested the sincerity of her words. “Oh! Mr. Larberry, I do hope we shall not lose him after all! Mr. Staggers—to my grief I say it—has already been the means of our losing two ministers. I trust he will not be able to succeed this time. And after all our labour, too, to get almost everybody for him. I’m sure Crock was to and fro all that day we voted, beatin’ up our friends and settin’ their hearts right in the matter. Everybody said, you know, there never would be such a number got in favour of any one else. We have voted a many times about different ministers, and it came to nothin’; *now* we have heard the right one. What a real improvin’ discourse Mr. Holland’s last was, wasn’t it? But Mr. Staggers expects better bread than can be made with wheat, as the sayin’ is. We are all for Mr. Holland, except him and his connections; what more do we want?”

“What, indeed?” assented Larberry.

There passed them at this moment a short, corpulent man, of a rather fierce aspect, who greeted them with a jerk of the head and a gruff "good mornin'." This was Mr. Todd, a farmer, of Dalwood, near Oxbury. He was not a church member, but he regularly attended service at Grange Street, and, following the example of his better half and his two daughters, professed himself an admirer of Mr. Holland.

"Ah," he said, joining them at a sign from Larberry; "there be some scabby sheep in our flock!" And he wagged his grizzled head with much solemnity.

"Mr. Todd," said Larberry, laying his hand upon the farmer's shoulder, "come, you are a friend. Won't *you* write to Mr. Holland, also?"

"Certainly I will," he replied, speaking in a rapid, guttural manner; "I am goin' to write to the young man this very day."

During his "probation" at Oxbury, Mr. Holland had been a frequent and welcome visitor at the farmer's house. Indeed, on

the occasion of his first visit to the town, the young student had made it his home. Perhaps it may not be deemed surprising that he should have awakened in the bosoms of the female members of the family feelings of deep interest. The Miss Todds even idolised him, *apparently*; and frequently, at the close of the day, they had warbled suitable melodies to him, and cheered his trusting heart by the high estimate they had evidently formed of his sermons. What if the young visitor *had* made no secret of his engagement to a young person at Davenstone? The nature and motive of their attentions were all the less liable to misconstruction by a suspicious and censorious world. How could either of them possibly hope or expect that engagement would be broken off on her account?

When the farmer, after parting from Dame Crock and Larberry, entered his own dwelling, the family met in secret conclave respecting the contemplated letter to Mr. Holland, and the result of their united counsels was that Johanna, the

elder daughter, with characteristic deliberation and an expenditure of much care, penned the following epistle :

"Dalwood Farm, near Oxbury, 187—.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I fear you will think us all very unmindful of you, not having replied to your kind letter to my dear father. I am sorry to say he has not been very well since you left us, and also so much engaged that he has been unable to write to you, so I venture to send a few lines to assure you how pleased we all are that you have decided to come among us, and we are looking forward to see you on Sabbath day. I am persuaded that much has been communicated to you of a painful nature, and we, as a family, are grieved that such is the case. However this may be, we trust all things will work together for good, and we may with safety feel all will be well, although so much opposition exists. I trust a change will soon be effected. Would that the church here were more united, but alas

for the people, they know not what they want.

“I gave your message to Mr. Gaskill ; he was anxiously looking for a letter from you.

“Hoping very soon to see you, and with our united kindest regards, believe me to remain,

“Very faithfully yours,

“JOHANNA TODD.

“Rev. Philip Holland.”

CHAPTER III.

CROSSING THE RUBICON.

THERE are in England, as the reader knows, a few cities which, centuries ago, were great and splendid, but which in recent times have fallen into comparative obscurity. Among the most interesting of these is Davenstone. In its tapestried halls many a royal court has been held, many a stormy parliament has kept its session. Here the heroes and heroines of many a curious legend had “a local habitation and a name.” Crusaders, monks, merchants, and poets, fair ladies and proud nobles—all have left memorials which it still cherishes as among its most valued possessions. Few cities are richer in antiquities: few

can boast a history so pure and honourable.

Brought up, as he was, in this ancient town, we can scarcely wonder that Philip Holland, who had read and thought much, and indulged in many a day-dream as he walked its quaint, time-honoured streets, we can scarcely wonder that this young man had sympathies beyond the sect of which he had become a minister. In what way those sympathies found expression, and how far the career he was about to commence at Oxbury tended to develop them, will be faithfully shown in these pages.

On the evening of the day when Johanna Todd's letter was written, as given in the last chapter, the pastor-elect was in very low spirits indeed. He was seated at a writing-table bestrewn with books, endeavouring to compose his sermon for the next ensuing Sunday morning—the sermon that was to inaugurate his ministry at Oxbury—his maiden discourse to his first charge. But what miserable

work it was ! He pushed his manuscript from him with a sensation of positive nausea. Taking up one of the books he essayed to read, but his thoughts were so occupied with his own unfortunate affairs, that his mind received no impression whatever from the page before him. How different a beginning was this to what he had anticipated ! He remembered how, when at college, he had looked forward to the time when he would be an ordained minister of his church. He had pictured himself as labouring amongst an attached and united people, they following him trustingly as he led them to higher and purer regions. He sincerely loved the calling he had chosen, and was quite resolved that he would work in it steadily, perseveringly, and conscientiously ; yet surely this was a very severe trial that had befallen him at the very outset ! The young man bowed his head, feeling that his was indeed a bitter disappointment.

“ Philip, dear,” said Mrs. Holland, who, while sitting at her needlework close by,

had been observing her son's restlessness, "I am afraid you will never be happy there. It is not too late to write and decline their invitation. If you will wait and have patience, and turn your thoughts in another direction, in due time a much more promising sphere will be opened to you. It is a sad prospect, going among a people so fickle and quarrelsome. And this Mr. Staggers, who is so much against you, being the acting trustee, too——"

"Don't dishearten the lad, my dear," said her husband, speaking from his position at the window, where he had been reading the *Davenstone Gazette* for the last hour. "We must hope for the best. Difficulties will do him no harm. Besides, I am not so sure that he will find a better opening if he waits. Let him take this opportunity, unpromising as it is, and make the best of it; work his way, and prove himself a man. Perhaps the reply he has sent to Mr. Staggers, and to the others who have been writing offensively to him,

has done them good, and reconciled them to his coming."

"I very much doubt if it has," replied Mrs. Holland despondingly; "I do not believe they feel any compunction or shame on account of what they have done, or that they will ever own themselves to have been in the wrong. I wonder Philip is not afraid to go into the midst of so many enemies."

"So many enemies!" echoed her husband, "why he can count them upon his fingers; and he has scores of friends. The Todds, and Mr. and Mrs. Crock, and that active man Larberry, all of whom we have heard our lad talk about so often, they are a host in themselves. Then there is Copperfox, we must not forget him; and there are many besides, whose names I forget, or have never heard of. Philip has the bulk of the people with him still."

"Yes, that is so, no doubt," said the young minister; "but I think the most un-

fortunate part of the business is that the two deacons, Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss, have wavered since I wrote, accepting the invitation, and have advised me not to go to Oxbury. That is the most trying circumstance to me. I calculated so fully upon the deacons' support and countenance, you know. I dare say they were dismayed by the persistency with which Mr. Staggers opposed me, even after I was elected."

"They are greatly to blame," replied Mr. Holland energetically. "They ought to have remembered that the antecedents of their community show that no minister, who was acceptable to the people generally, could expect Mr. Staggers' support."

"That was one of the points I had to consider," remarked his son. "Should I be standing in the way of another and far better preacher, who, with the people in his favour, could also enlist Mr. Staggers under his leadership?"

"True," said Mr. Holland, "that was

the question. And I do not think you would."

"Neither do I," rejoined Philip. "The deacons themselves had assured me again and again that it would be useless to expect that the church members would ever give a perfectly unanimous vote about any candidate."

"Ah! I can't make those deacons out at all," said Mrs. Holland.

"Well," remarked her husband, resuming his newspaper, "let us hope that the private letter, which I understand Philip has sent them since he accepted the invitation, has brought them to their senses again, and that matters will work round in time."

No more was said, and Philip began to put away his books and papers, and to make preparations for going out for the evening. As he was pulling on his gloves his mother remarked :

"You are going to Convent Street, I suppose?"

"Yes,"

In Convent Street resided Mrs. Vaveley, a widow of some means, who occupied a large, rambling, old-fashioned house, the drawing-room of which the reader is now invited to enter. It is a spacious room with dark oaken wainscot, and a lofty oak chimney-piece enriched with elaborate and grotesque carving. Although neither elegant nor costly, the furniture attests the fact that the widow is possessed of refinement and a cultivated taste. Of course, that elderly lady seated at the table reading is Mrs. Vaveley, and the fair young girl who stands at the window watching the street from behind the curtain is her daughter Kate. The latter is evidently expecting some one this evening, and just at this moment she catches sight of Philip Holland, and runs to open the door for him. Everybody said the young man was a "lucky fellow" to have obtained an introduction to this family, for the widow was of good position, and Kate might have made "a better match." Very delightful evenings has the young minister spent in this

drawing-room, and on this occasion, as the time passes very quickly in pleasant talk, with now and then a little music, none of the three forgets that it is almost his last visit prior to entering upon his duties at Oxbury. At length Philip begins turning over the leaves of an album containing photographs of places of historical and architectural interest in Davenstone.

"I always had an affection for these old ruins, Katie," he said ; "but our good city is dearer to me now I am going away, of course."

"When do you leave, Philip?" asked Mrs. Vaveley.

"I purpose going on Saturday."

"And have you taken a last farewell of these localities?" laughed Kate.

"Not yet," he replied. "Katie, what do you say? Shall we pay them a valedictory visit now, if your mother is willing?"

"Oh yes," she replied, "I should like it of all things. Violet will be sure to be home soon, and will sit with you, mother ; we will not start till she comes."

Violet was a younger sister of the fair speaker. She had been spending the evening with an invalid old lady, a bedridden acquaintance of the family. Very soon the door opened, and Violet entered. She was about eighteen years of age, and a most beautiful girl.

"Did Mr. Collington accompany you to the street-door, as usual?" asked Kate of her sister.

"Yes," replied Violet, with a smile; "but he would not be induced to enter the house on this occasion."

"Well, I warn you not to marry him," said Kate, laughing. "You must marry a clergyman, as I have told you before."

"I know of a clergyman," said Philip, "who is in want of a wife; and Violet would suit him exactly."

"Who is that?" they all asked in a breath.

"Mr. Maxforth, the Rector of Oxbury."

"Ah, Oxbury is so far off, and I may never see him," said Violet.

"Shall we pay the farewell visit we

talked of now, Kate?" asked the young minister, after a pause.

"Yes ; I am ready."

They strolled together as far as Glossop Hill, a lovely spot on the outskirts of the town, where they wandered among the ruins of the ancient priory, talking pleasantly of Oxbury, of the future, and a thousand other things. But all this time there was one trouble that lay somewhat heavily upon Philip's mind—he had not had the courage to tell Kate about those annoying letters he had received from Mr. Staggers and Mr. Flint, stating that he had better reconsider his decision, and not go to Oxbury at all. When, some days previously, he had received those communications, he had said to himself, "I must tell Katie of these letters, and she must read them." Nevertheless, he had not mentioned them to her, and she had not read them. He found it was not easy for him to make the disclosure. "And, after all, what need is there that she should know?" he now asked himself. "It would only

occasion her distress and anxiety, for to her the matter would seem much more serious than it does to me." There was also another consideration which kept him silent upon the subject. It should be known that Kate had not been brought up as a Dissenter, and that she knew little or nothing of their ways and modes of proceeding in ecclesiastical affairs. Philip was very desirous that she should learn to like his own people, and it occurred to him that she might not do this if she were to know about these letters. "Far better, too, to spare her the pain," he told himself. And besides, he felt sure that the disaffected would be won over to him in a month or two, and "it would be much better," he thought, "to tell her when this unpleasantness has been tidied over, and we can afford to laugh about the matter, as something our opponents have repented of." But at other times he felt inclined to show her the letters.

They were returning homewards through the streets of the quaint old town, and as they came to the time-worn entrance to St.

John's Hall, he said to himself, "It would be better to tell her." They turned up a flight of stairs; but as they were pacing the floor of the grand hall—now empty of all but themselves—the fading light struggling feebly through the north window, and dimly revealing the minstrel gallery with its grim row of old armour, the former feeling returned, and he thought, "At any rate I will not tell her yet." And they passed out again, moving slowly and thoughtfully under the ancient city gateway, and past that glorious fane whose spire, gleaming at the moment in the rays of the declining sun, is the admiration of all architects. Many times during the stroll Kate had noticed his abstraction, but she asked him no question in reference to it; and when at last they parted for the night, he had not told her respecting the counsel given him by the deacon and the acting trustee.

The postman on the following morning brought him two letters—Johanna Todd's and Mr. Larberry's. These strengthened

the resolve he had formed not to give way to the pressure that had been brought to bear on him ; and when on the next day he received a cheering communication from Mr. Copperfox, and another from Reuben Crock, he was more than ever convinced that he might reckon on general and resolute support. Two or three other letters of an encouraging nature reached him in the course of the next three days, under the stimulating influence of which he paid his last visit to Convent Street and bade Kate good-bye. And now the day had arrived when he was to leave for Oxbury.

“Good-bye, Philip,” said tearful Mrs. Holland, when the moment for parting came, adding, to her son’s great surprise, “until we see you again in a week or so.”

“I haven’t any intention of coming to see you so soon as that,” was his half-amused, half-vexed reply.

“Perhaps not ; but, oh dear !” she cried hysterically, “I do believe that almost as soon as you get to Oxbury, you will be obliged to beat a retreat from it.”

“Don’t have such ridiculous fancies, my dear,” said her husband.

“They are not ridiculous fancies. Suppose Mr. Staggers and Mr. Flint have made up their minds that he shall not even set his foot inside their chapel on Sunday, and suppose they put another minister in the pulpit beforehand, and will not suffer our Philip to get possession of it,” cried the excited old lady.

“Oh, well,” returned her husband, thinking it best to laugh away her fears, “in case they make a disturbance, you know, I have heard Philip say there is a police-station close by. He must hand them over to the secular arm. Good-bye, my lad,” he continued seriously, grasping his son’s hand; “every blessing go with thee. Continue to live in the fear of God; do your duty conscientiously; and never fear the face of any man.”

As the afternoon train which carried Philip towards his new duties drew nigh to Oxbury, he observed a strange minister enter one of the carriages at a station about

twelve miles from his destination. He could not help thinking of the unpleasant possibility his mother's fears had suggested, and his mind was not altogether free from anxiety. It was a considerable relief when, on getting out of the train at Oxbury, and watching apprehensively to see if the stranger alighted also, he found that he was going farther on.

There was one person waiting for him on the platform, and that was Mr. Copperfox.

"Very glad to see you, sir," said he deferentially; and he insisted upon carrying the young minister's portmanteau. "Mrs. Handel has prepared your rooms, sir, and is expecting you."

Philip had made a temporary arrangement for lodgings at the house of the person named, hoping to move into the chapel-house at some future time.

"Mr. Todd, sir, hopes you will do him the favour to take supper at his house to-night," Copperfox resumed, as they proceeded along Bridge Street. "But here we are at my humble home. Would you

step in, sir, for just a few minutes? Mrs. Copperfox hoped you would be so kind."

And when they entered his conductor's dwelling, very cordial was the greeting the young minister received from Mrs. Copperfox. Indeed, so kind and friendly was that lady's manner, that Philip was secretly angry with himself on account of an inward distrust that had taken possession of him in reference to her. He felt he disliked her, and also her obsequious spouse, and at the same time he mentally condemned the aversion as unreasonable and groundless.

But at Mr. Todd's house, whither, after taking possession of his lodgings, he proceeded—there he felt once more at home. There he passed an agreeable evening; and when he returned to his lodgings and retired to his bedroom that night, he looked forward to the morrow with hope and satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. CURLER'S PROMISE.

THE deacons met Philip Holland in the vestry on the following day, and said they hoped he had not felt hurt by the letter they had sent him, as they had tried to act for the best according to the light given them at the time. They also told him they now intended to give him their best support. As to Mr. Staggers, they vehemently condemned his proceedings, and thought he and his friends even deserved a vote of censure from the church. All things considered, Mr. Holland made a satisfactory beginning at Grange Street that day. The disaffected, it is true, were conspicuous by their absence ; but still the chapel was well

attended, and the young minister preached so well that the general belief was the straying sheep would soon return to the fold. The deacons hinted to him that the chapel-house would shortly be ready for his reception, as the trustees had nearly completed the repair of the chapel property. They feared, however, that Mr. Staggers was about to display his animosity by some vexatious measures, though of what nature they could not discover. During the course of a long consultation, it was thought advisable, inasmuch as there still existed an old-fashioned preference for a pastor regularly invested with the sacerdotal function, that Mr. Holland's ordination should take place without delay.

"I quite agree with you, sir," Mr. Flint remarked, "in thinking that the ceremony would be likely to have a good effect both upon friends and opponents."

"Though of course we do not regard it as able to confer any gift or grace," added Mr. Gloss, with a cautionary movement of his forefinger.

"Oh no—certainly not," said Mr. Flint.

"Still," said Mr. Gloss, "as an act of recognition, if nothing more, it will tend, sir, to establish you in your office."

"Then, if all's well," said Mr. Holland, rising, "I will run down to Bulton next week, and arrange with Dr. Curler about it. Dr. Curler, you know, is the president of the college at which I was trained, and I must secure him. Fortunately, Mr. Lingwood also, my pastor, is now living at Bulton, so I can arrange with him at the same time."

As the train was carrying Mr. Holland to Bulton, on a sultry afternoon in the following week, he felt glad that he had not tormented Kate by telling her about those hateful letters he had received when at Davenstone. She would have been alarmed and rendered anxious to no purpose, he thought, and would have no idea how comfortable and hopeful he really was. There was one thing, however, that troubled him. He was afraid he was getting distrustful. He wished he could take Mr. Flint and Mr.

Gloss into his confidence about his own affairs, but he did not find himself able to do it. He was sorry for it, but he could not confide in them to the extent he desired to do. He had good reason to believe that whatever he told them would straightway be communicated to Mr. Copperfox, who would at once carry it to Mr. Staggers ; and he did not wish, under present circumstances, that the latter gentleman should be acquainted with all his movements and intentions.

“I have no doubt he knows all about this journey I am making to-day,” he said to himself.

But although this thought entered Philip’s mind, it did not occur to him that his opponent could possibly have any intention of endeavouring to frustrate the design he had in view. Consequently, he felt no misgiving as to the success of the application he was about to make to Dr. Curler and Mr. Lingwood.

“Hullo ! here’s Holland !” shouted several students, as the young ecclesiastic was

getting out of the cab at the college gates ; and rushing forward, they met him in the hall, in which were several boxes, carpet-bags, and portmanteaus ; for the session had just closed, and the students were about to take their flight—*some* of them for a few weeks, *others* to settle over their respective churches. “ Come in ; you are just in time for the farewell supper,” they said to him.

“ Glad to hear it,” was the rejoinder ; “ I have been reckoning on being present at your symposium to-night. Are the men who are leaving all settled ?” he asked.

“ All excepting Skerman,” they replied. “ Brown has accepted an invitation to Manchester, Carr is going to settle at Tunbridge Wells, and Murdock is off to China.”

“ How are you, Murdock ?” said the visitor, shaking hands with a tall, broad-chested young fellow, with a long neck and a very small head, who came striding up the passage at this moment, humming a lively air.

“ Quite well, thank you, old boy ; how

are you? Come up into my study, and let us have a chat."

Mr. Holland followed him up a staircase and down a long corridor, on either side of which opened the students' "rooms." Murdock led his friend into one of these, and closed the door.

"I have got through a good deal of hard work this session," he said, seating himself upon the table and lighting his pipe; "so now I shall take mine ease, Holland."

The visitor knew that Murdock was a well-read man, a fair scholar, and a hard student, and could quite believe he had fairly earned a little rest and recreation.

"Well, and how goes your little affair over the way?" said Philip, after he had given his friend an account of Oxbury, and they had discoursed upon a great variety of topics besides. He moved his head, as he spoke, in the direction of a row of semi-detached villas, which he could see in the distance as he stood at the open window. "She has consented to go with you, of course," he said, turning his face, and look-

ing at Murdock, who looked grave, and replied :

“ I wish she had, but that would have been too much happiness for me, and I mustn't expect it. In fact, I never ought to have expected it.”

“ But have you asked her to do so ?” said his friend, who knew Murdock's character.

“ Well, you see,” replied the other, “ there are so many things to be considered. Look at the condition of her parents—and she is their only child. No : Amy Franklin will never consent to go and live among the Celestials along with a poor fellow like me. Besides, her father is furious at the bare idea of such a thing.” And Murdock laid down his pipe, and covered his face with his hands.

After a long silence, Mr. Holland said :

“ The coming year may work many changes in your favour—who knows ? For of course you will spend twelve months up in London before you sail, will you not ?”

“ Yes, I must attend a course of lectures in medicine, and then I am off to China. I

say, old fellow," he said, brightening as with a new idea, "you could do me a very great service, if you would?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"Why, this. I know you are a capital draughtsman; can you draw, from memory, a face that you have only seen once or twice?"

Mr. Holland at once divined what he wanted; and taking a drawing-pencil from his pocket, while his friend procured him a large sheet of paper, he proceeded to sketch the features of Amy Franklin as faithfully as his memory and skill would allow him, saying:

"I cannot promise you a good likeness; but I will do my best."

"Ten thousand thanks, old fellow," said Murdock, when the drawing was completed and he was stowing it away in his desk; "this shall be most carefully preserved, depend upon it."

A bell commenced ringing as he spoke.

"That is the call to supper," he said.

They descended together to the dining-

room, where they found the students were already sitting down to the banquet. After this came the speeches, in which Skerman, who *had not* obtained a sphere of labour, was condoled with, and Brown and Carr, and Murdock, who *had*, were congratulated, with many hearty wishes for their future success. When they came to speak of Murdock, Mr. Holland was delighted to find how highly he was esteemed, and how true a friend he had been to many of his associates. A neat speech was made in reply by each of the outgoing students, and then the proceedings, during which much had been said that was humorous and witty, were brought to a close.

The next day Mr. Holland could not obtain an interview with Dr. Curler, owing to the multiplicity of engagements crowding on the latter at the close of every session. The young minister, however, dined with Mr. Lingwood, who named two dates, on either of which he would be "most happy" to assist at his friend's ordination. Surely the Doctor's willingness to do so was a

matter of certainty now? Mr. Holland, forgetting how many a slip there is between the cup and the lip, and not giving a single thought to the acting trustee at Oxbury, did not dream of any difficulty with his old tutor.

The following morning, on ringing at the door of Dr. Curler's house, he was admitted by the servant, and shown into the library. Here sat the Doctor, who rose and shook hands with him; and then Philip, after a few preliminary words, stated his business and asked his question.

While he was speaking, his old tutor was searching among a heap of letters upon the mantelpiece. At length he said:

"You meet with a good deal of opposition at Oxbury, don't you, Mr. Holland?"

"There has been some opposition, certainly," replied Philip; "but none, I hope, that is of moment, or likely to be permanent."

"Ah!" said the Doctor, shaking his grey head, and smiling, "the dissident members are more resolute than you imagined. I

received a letter the day before yesterday—let me see—ha! here it is—from a Mr.——”

Philip listened with wonder, dismay, and indignation. His enemies were manifestly bent on harassing him to the utmost, he thought, and were unscrupulous as to the means they employed. His thoughts at once reverted to the acting trustee.

“Mr. Staggers, I dare say,” he said.

“That is the name! Yes, here is the signature. He says, first, that you took only one day in which to consider the invitation that had been sent you——”

“That is false,” said Philip.

“Secondly, that you are not possessed of any sound principles. Thirdly—but read the letter yourself; you will see he makes several other charges, and then he winds up by asking me not to assist at your ordination, and, in fact, begging me to do my utmost to prevent its taking place.”

Philip took the letter his tutor put into his hand, and read every word of it carefully.

"It is the most iniquitous piece of business I ever heard of," was his remark, on finishing the perusal.

"Those statements are not true, I imagine," said the Doctor.

"There is not one of them true."

"I thought not. Had I not known you well, however, that effusion would have done you serious injury. As it happened, I had no sooner read it than I saw it contained a gross libel ; and had the individual attacked been in any other profession or calling than ours, he would probably have instituted legal proceedings against the author. Not only are the statements defamatory of your character, but they were made without lawful excuse. They are not true, and Mr. Staggers cannot plead in justification that they are "privileged." He had no right to take upon himself to act for the church, since he holds no office in it, neither had he been authorised to act in its name."

"Might I suggest," said Philip, after he had given the Doctor a sketch of the cir-

cumstances of the church at Oxbury, and of the events that had led to his settlement there—" Might I suggest that it would be well for Mr. Flint to write to you now, and give his version of the matter? You will find he will fully corroborate my account, and I do not wish that my assertions should be received, unsupported by other evidence."

Philip then mentioned the names of several of the leading men at Grange Street, any one, or all of whom, in addition to the deacons, would be able to contradict Mr. Staggers' statements.

" Their testimony is quite unnecessary," said the Doctor. " I have not the slightest reason to doubt your own word."

" But if you please, Dr. Curler, I would rather some one should write to you. I should like you to learn the real state of the case from the deacons, at any rate."

" Well, since you wish it, let Mr. Flint send me a line or two. And—let me see—which were the two dates Mr. Lingwood mentioned to you, did you say, on either

of which he would be able to come to Oxbury ?”

“He named the 14th and the 21st of August,” said Philip.

“The 14th will suit me best,” said the Doctor. “And if all be well, I will be with you on that day.”

Philip thanked him, and then the interview ended.

By this time most of the students had left the college, and the young minister thought it was time he also took his departure for Oxbury. Murdock had not yet gone. When bidding him good-bye that afternoon, Philip said to him :

“You will let me hear from you, now and then ?”

“Yes, certainly,” he replied.

“And,” said Philip, grasping his hand, “notwithstanding what you have told me, I hope, one day, to learn that you have prevailed on Amy to go to China with you.”

“And I,” said Murdock, “hope very soon to hear that you have married Kate Vaveley.”

“ Ah !” thought Philip, as he was on his way to the railway station, “ there is a good deal to be done before I can marry, and I find that arranging for my ordination is a more difficult business than I imagined. And suppose Mr. Flint should disappoint me as to the letter I have engaged he shall write to the Doctor. He has disappointed me before now, and may do so again. But, no ; I will trust him in this matter, for I believe he and Mr. Gloss have both learnt wisdom, and really mean to give me, as they said, their ‘ best support.’ ”

CHAPTER V.

A CONCESSION.

ABOUT half a mile from Oxbury, on the east, there is a hill on the top of which stands an old windmill. This windmill, with much of the surrounding land, is the property of Silas Winstock, farmer, miller, and corn-merchant. Winstock had not always been in such good circumstances as he is at the present time, for Dame Crock's husband can remember his entering Oxbury, sixty years ago, in a smock-frock, and working as a day labourer. Many a time has Winstock talked with his miller of that period of his history, and told him how at first he was able to buy only half a quarter of oats, and then, as he was seen to be

prompt in payment, and diligent in his business, he had been allowed to make purchases on a larger scale, until, at the end of the first year, he found he had saved a hundred pounds. At the end of the second, he had laid by three hundred, and so on. "But, Henry," he would say, "I found that as the money-bag got fuller, I held the strings tighter."

In saying this, however, Silas was unjust to himself. He was careful in his expenditure, certainly, and keen in driving a bargain; indeed, there was no shrewder man in Oxbury; but he was very benevolent, and many an indigent neighbour in his distress had received provisions or money from him, without being able to discover the donor: for Winstock loved to hide from his left hand the doings of his right.

Now although the old man had made his way so well in the world, or rather, perhaps, on that very account, it still continued necessary for him to bestir himself about his land and in the mill. The grinding of the corn, and such matters, were managed

for him by Henry, who had been in his service twenty years ; but every morning Winstock drove in his little chaise from Oxbury to look after him.

And Silas Winstock it is, who, on this sunny August morning, is driving slowly up the hill for that purpose. As his white pony toils up the ascent, the old man is listening to the creaking of the great sails of the windmill as they whirl round, discoursing, he thinks, the sweetest music that could possibly be heard ; and he turns his head from side to side, and looks, with satisfaction beaming in his ruddy face, at the broad acres that sweep down on either hand, for they are covered with unusually heavy crops this year. Anon he looks upon the forest in front of him, which extends several miles upon the horizon. When he has gained the brow of the hill, he drives through a gate on his right hand, alights, fastens his pony, and then passes into the mill. Here his time is often occupied in theological disputes with Henry, whose Antinomian doctrines Winstock, although they both

attend the little Calvinistic meeting-house in Oxbury (not far from Grange Street Chapel), deems it his duty to assail. The servant, however, stoutly defends his ground on all these occasions, his superior knowledge and fluency sometimes giving him an advantage over his master.

Such was the case this morning, and Winstock, after an argument of two hours' duration, slowly retired from the field, got into his chaise, and started for Oxbury. As he passed out of the gate, Mr. Todd, mounted on his black horse Samson, was riding by up the lane, on his way to Dalewood Farm.

"How are you getting on at Grange Street, Mr. Todd?" was the query of old Silas, as he brought his white pony to a stand.

Winstock knew what a staunch supporter of Mr. Holland the farmer was, and although he himself was a member of the Calvinistic meeting-house already mentioned, the old man occasionally went to hear the young minister, and always spoke

very highly of him. Winstock's son Albert, on the other hand, attended at Grange Street; and inasmuch as it had seemed good to that young gentleman to attach himself to Mr. Staggers' clique, old Silas frequently quarrelled with his son on that account.

"We are gettin' on very well," replied Todd, reining in Samson, and patting his neck with his fat hand. He then sat upright, that his portly rotundity might produce a suitable impression upon the listener, and added, "I back the minister up, and mean to; he is improvin' fast, and I can't think what Mr. Staggers can say against his preachin'. You will find he will prosper."

"I hope he will, and I see no reason why he shouldn't," said Winstock. "The only fault I find with him is, that he preaches to sinners. But when he has got more experience, he will learn that we are but clay in the hands of the potter."

"That would be a comfortin' doctrine to preach to Mr. Staggers," said the farmer,

taking off his "wide-awake," and wiping his bald head with a red handkerchief. "He wouldn't have so much to answer for, if it was true. What a troublesome, obstinate man he is! You heard about his writin' to Dr. Curler, didn't you?"

"Yes," replied Winstock, "I heard about it. If I had been Mr. Holland, I would have called him to account for writing such things about me."

"So would I," said Todd, pulling at his grizzled beard. "Well, you know, Mr. Flint wrote to the Doctor, contradictin' all that Staggers had said, and representin' matters as they really was, so it was all arranged, and Staggers was foiled. But he isn't satisfied with the mischief he has done already; he is now annoyin' Mr. Holland, and puttin' him to great inconvenience in another way."

"What way is that?" inquired Winstock.

"Well, you are aware, I suppose," replied the farmer, with dignity, "that there is an endowment at Grange Street?"

“Of course I am.”

“And you know that Mr. Staggers is the actin’ trustee?”

“Certainly I do; but there’s no rents due to Mr. Holland just yet, and he quite understood that for the first twelvemonth he would receive none, as all the money would be wanted to pay for the repair of the chapel property.”

“I know that,” said Todd, speaking with his usual rapid utterance; “the matter I am alludin’ to relates to the house built by the side of the chapel for the use of the minister. You see, now that Mr. Holland is settled here, he has a right to go and live in that house.”

“Of course he has,” said Winstock. “Have they finished repairing it?”

“Bless your life, they finished long since,” replied the farmer. “But look you,” he added indignantly, “Mr. Holland can’t get possession of it; in fact, he hasn’t been allowed even to see the inside of it yet, though he has been minister here nearly two months. It’s a shame, I say.

He wants to get the house furnished, and has been wantin' to do so for weeks past; he has sent again and again to Mr. Staggers, asking him for the keys of the premises, and he won't give them up."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself; and if I was Mr. Holland, I would bring the matter before the church; it would soon see him righted."

"You wouldn't get him to do that. He tells me its meetings were intended for a higher purpose than hearin' about his troubles. He would put up with anything sooner than make a complaint in public, or at a church meetin'."

"He prefers to wait patiently, I suppose," said Winstock; "and it is best to do so."

"Is it?" said the farmer, his utterance becoming more rapid than ever. "It may be; but I know this, I feel so mad about the minister not bein' allowed to go into his own house, that I should like to go with him to-night, since he can't get the keys, and effect a forcible entry. I

would burst the front door open for him with the greatest pleasure."

Winstock laughed at this, and expressed a hope that there would be no need to proceed to extremities.

"I don't know; there may be," said Todd dubiously. "But stop, I haven't told you all. You remember, there is a nice bit of garden belongin' to the minister's house?"

"I remember it," was Winstock's rejoinder.

"Well, Staggers is strippin' it of its fruits and flowers with all the coolness imaginable. It's my belief he is egged on by his two daughters. They are the most active and brazen in the work, any way. Yesterday, they were gatherin' pears and damsons and peaches in the minister's garden, with as much assurance as if it was their own property."

"What does Mr. Holland say to that?"

"Why, it galls him terribly, I know. But that is just what they do it for. They had the impudence to call at his lodgings,

on their way to the garden, and invite his landlady, Mrs. Handel, to go with them, in a friendly way, to taste the fruit, and bring a few flowers home with her. Mr. Holland happened to pass across her shop, as they were standin' there talkin' to her, and he overheard them, for they spoke loud on purpose that he might hear, but they didn't take any notice of him."

"Well," said Winstock, settling himself comfortably in his chaise, and giving his pony a flick with his whip, "this state of things can't last long. Good-bye." And so he and the farmer parted.

While driving slowly back to Oxbury, old Silas was cogitating upon the news he had just been hearing; and he told himself that on the first opportunity he would speak his mind plainly to Mr. Staggers upon the subject.

It happened that an opportunity presented itself that very afternoon. Mr. Staggers, whose occupation was that of a chemist and druggist, and who was doing an extensive business in High Street, was

sauntering to and fro, on the pavement in front of his shop windows, as Winstock came walking up the street. The next moment the two men stood facing each other, and Winstock at once plunged headlong into the strife, saying, in his brusque way :

“ You are doin’ very wrong in that affair of Mr. Holland’s house.”

“ Mr. Winstock,” said the druggist coolly, “ I beg to inform you that it is *not* Mr. Holland’s house, and never will be.”

As he spoke, his slight, tall figure, attired as it was in well-brushed broadcloth, and crowned by his snowy beard and hair, and those acrid features, presented an appearance at once gentlemanlike, cynical, venerable, and self-possessed. He was such a contrast to old Silas, with his blunt, rough speech, and homely garments !

“ There is a house,” continued Mr. Staggers, taking his snuff-box from his pocket and tapping it, “ which was intended to be beneficially occupied by the minister for the time being ; but that house is not Mr.

Holland's; he is not even a beneficiary resident."

"He soon will be, though," retorted Silas, speaking in a loud tone, and with a great deal of emphasis, "if he stops in Oxbury."

"But he is not likely to remain in Oxbury," said the trustee, indiscreetly venturing on a prediction; "there are too many difficulties around him to admit of his doing so. He will not remain here long, you will find."

"But whether he does or not," said Winstock, "you have no right to keep the keys of them premises, when you know he wants 'em, and has sent again and again to ask you for 'em."

"Surely, Mr. Winstock," said the druggist, "you cannot be unacquainted with the fact that we have been putting the chapel property—the house you speak of included—into thorough repair. I have, it is true received a notification from the builder and painter, to the effect that the repairs are completed, but I and the other trustees

have yet to satisfy ourselves, by a personal inspection, that they have properly executed their work."

"You needn't try to throw dust in my eyes, by such talk as that," said Winstock, who knew that his interlocutor's explanation was but a frivolous pretext. "I say again," he added, "that you do wrong in keeping the keys."

"I am not going to give him any encouragement to remain," was the trustee's rejoinder, "which I should be doing if I gave them up."

"Then you will get yourself into trouble, that's all," said Winstock; and, with that, he walked away.

Mr. Staggers, supporting himself by his stick, turned into his shop, and continued moving feebly along until he reached his back sitting-room. Here he found Mrs. Staggers and his two daughters, Jael and Judith. The girls, each laden with a small, covered basket, had entered the house just previously to Silas Winstock's encounter with their parent, and at this moment were

arranging fruit upon various dishes, and calling their mother's attention to its unusual size and excellence.

Bestowing but a single glance at the table, Mr. Staggers dropped languidly into a chair. "There, there, take them away!" he said, with some impatience.

"Oh, papa," said Judith, the younger daughter, "we must finish sorting them, first. We have had such fun! We took Mrs. Handel to the chapel garden again to-day, and Mr. Holland would look foolish, I'll be bound, when she got back home and showed him the flowers we had given her, and told him where they came from!"

A somewhat loud ringing and knocking at the house-door at this moment cut her observations short. A servant entered.

"If you please, sir," she said to the head of the family, "here is Mr. Flint, and he wants to know, can he speak with you a few minutes?"

"We know beforehand what he is come about," said Jael sullenly.

"Don't see him, papa," cried Judith

coaxingly. "He is only acting as that man's catspaw."

"Nonsense, child," said her mother; "your papa must speak with him."

"Show him in," said Mr. Staggers to the servant; and then, turning his flushed face to his daughters, he said, "Can't you clear the table?"

"No, papa," replied Jael. "Let them remain."

As she spoke, Mr. Flint entered the room. The girls continued their trifling with the fruit at the table, occasionally throwing scornful glances at the deacon. Their mother, however, betrayed a slight tremor. Mr. Staggers, rising stiffly, planted his back against the mantelpiece.

"I exceedingly regret, Mr. Flint," he said, when he had requested the visitor to take a seat, "to observe the flagging condition to which the church is now reduced. It was in a very flourishing state at the time I was actively associated with it, and honoured with the conduct of its affairs."

The social position of Mr. Flint was by

no means so good as that of the acting trustee. In fact, Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss were both poor men, though the former had received a sound education, if his views *were* somewhat narrow.

The visitor quite understood that Mr. Staggers' words conveyed a distant allusion to his inferior *status*, and replied, firmly but humbly :

“ If our community is not prospering, sir, as in the halcyon days to which you refer, I am convinced that the members have only themselves to blame—and especially the leading members. Soon after our former minister, Mr. Bathosley, left us, we became notorious for our dissensions. Immorality on the part of certain church members was not visited with a just punishment, our organisations became neglected, and apathy settled down upon us all. Mr. Holland, and we who support him, have therefore to contend against difficulties arising from a state of things prevailing prior to his settlement amongst us. But enough of this.

Shall we have the pleasure, sir, of seeing you at Grange Street next Sunday?"

"Do you really think you could find room for me?" replied Mr. Staggers, in a bantering tone. "Isn't the chapel so full that you positively have not a single sitting vacant?"

"We would find room for you, in any case, Mr. Staggers," replied the deacon.

His eye, as he spoke, wandered to the table, and rested on a dish of fine apricots. He had not the least idea that they came out of the chapel garden, for no one had made any complaint to him upon the subject. Nevertheless, he now moved nervously upon his chair, and looking furtively at the trustee, said, in a hesitating manner:

"Mr. Holland wished me to come to ask you if you would let him have the keys of the minister's house?"

The girls giggled, and glanced meaningly at their father. He knew they wanted him to refuse. The words of Silas Winstock, however, were still in his mind; and on

other accounts also he deemed it prudent to make some concession.

“ I wish he would exercise a little more patience, and show himself a little less mercenary,” he growled, as he moved feebly and unsteadily across the room to get the keys ; and the next minute, as he put them into the hands of the envoy, he added, with emphasis : “ You must bring them back again this evening. The trustees are coming to-morrow, to look over the property.”

CHAPTER VI.

MR. HOLLAND CONSULTS THE RECTOR.

WITH the keys safe in his pocket, the deacon started for Philip's lodging. He felt satisfied with the result of his negotiation, though his success had been only partial, since the trustee had merely lent the keys, not delivered them up. But to have obtained them for a few hours only, Mr. Flint regarded as a good omen. This unexpected concession on the part of Mr. Stagers was another of many occurrences which had recently given the deacon great hopes of the coming prosperity of the church at Grange Street. Mr. Holland's discourses were now received with general and growing acceptance; the chapel was

gradually filling ; and occasionally even Mr. Staggers himself came to hear the obnoxious minister. Furthermore, Mr. Holland was indefatigable in the work of visiting his flock. Should he continue, therefore, to be guiltless of indiscretions, it was not improbable that the church would eventually flourish in an unprecedented degree under his care. Hitherto he had been most circumspect. His deportment had disarmed his opponents, and caused his supporters to be jubilant.

But there was one feature in Mr. Holland's character which caused the deacon a considerable amount of uneasiness, and that was, his liberality with regard to the various religious bodies. Mr. Flint would have preferred that he should have been less disposed to defend, where it was practicable, their respective organisations, and that his sermons and lectures should be a little more aggressive. With regard to the Established Church, especially, the views of the young minister and those of his subordinate by no means coincided. Both

were in favour of disestablishment ; but while the Church was Mr. Flint's special aversion, Mr. Holland, on the other hand, regarded her with friendliness. No serious difficulty, however, had as yet arisen on this account, and the deacon cherished a hope that beneath his fostering care these lax sentiments would in time be eradicated.

Taking everything into account, Mr. Flint was of opinion that Grange Street would soon see brighter days. He now began even to blame himself and Mr. Gloss as in part the authors of the division in the church. The policy they had pursued when Mr. Holland came "on approbation," had, he now believed, wrought a considerable amount of mischief.

Dame Crock had told him from the first that it would do so. At the beginning of each week of his probationary stay in Oxbury, the deacons had given him a list of the names of those persons on whom they wished him to make calls in the course of that week ; and he, an utter stranger, of course, to the place and its inhabitants, had

implicitly obeyed their instructions. Consequently, Mr. Staggers and his friends had not been waited on until visits had been paid to all the other members.

This had given the druggist's clique great offence, as not showing them sufficient respect. Had Mr. Holland been permitted to pay his respects to Mr. Staggers at an earlier period, the deacon thought that the invitation afterwards given to the candidate would have been an unanimous one. As it was, invidious distinctions had been drawn, and proper consideration had not been shown to those who, although a small minority, were yet prominent members.

Yes, that was a blunder, certainly ; but now there was a prospect of peace and union. Mr. Holland's attitude towards his opponents was pacific and conciliatory. His public discourses were entirely free from invective. He never descended to personalities, and, when out of the pulpit, never animadverted upon their conduct, or spoke in their disparagement.

Mr. Flint reflected upon these things

with pleasure, and an unwonted exhilaration was in his heart, as, taking the keys out of his pocket, and carrying them triumphantly in his hand, he ascended the stairs leading to the young minister's study.

"Why, has he actually given them up at last!" exclaimed Philip, when the deacon entered the room.

"Not exactly given them up, sir; he has lent them. He says the trustees are going to look over the property to-morrow, and he must have them returned to him."

"Very well; but it is to be hoped that he will give them up before long, now."

"I dare say he will—at least I hope so," said Mr. Flint. "Shall we go and look over the house at once, sir?" he asked, keeping the keys tightly grasped in his hand, as if he feared Mr. Holland meant to snatch them from him.

"Yes, certainly. I will just put away these books and papers, and then I shall be at your service."

The deacon, in the meantime, was narrowly scrutinising the book-shelves. At

length he placed his forefinger upon a volume of sermons by one of the Puritan divines, and said mournfully :

“ I wish such discourses as these were preached nowadays, sir. Sermons have sadly degenerated. They lack depth.”

“ That may be ; but they are more varied and interesting,” said Philip.

“ But we have lost more than we have gained, especially when the teaching upon doctrinal points is unscriptural and pernicious,” said Mr. Flint, thumping the table with the keys, to add force to his words.

“ I should be sorry to believe that the great majority of our preachers teach unsound doctrine. Some do, no doubt ; but, as a rule, I think they are not unorthodox, and in our churches the good old Puritan element is still strong.”

“ But our churches, it seems to me, are becoming more worldly every day ; and in our own body we do not uphold our distinctive principles with sufficient courage.”

“ True ; but still we must not act the

part of the Knights of St. John," said Philip, smiling.

"What did they do, sir?"

"Turned their lances, you remember, against their brethren, the Knights Templars, when they ought to have been fighting the common foe—the Moslem."

The deacon winced at this, and moved his feet uneasily.

"If you are ready, sir, we had better go to the chapel-house now," he said.

Accordingly, they went together and looked over the empty house, Philip taking rough measurements of the windows, with a view to curtains and blinds.

Mr. Flint, after showing him over the rooms, conducted him into the garden, which had become a very wilderness, having been entirely neglected during the interregnum. The young minister observed, however, that notwithstanding the inroads made by Mr. Staggers and his daughters, a good deal of fine fruit still remained ungathered. To the manifest horror of the deacon, he picked a few red currants, and ate them.

Mr. Flint, in the meantime, eyed him askance, thinking that the act betokened an indecent haste to take possession ; from which you perceive that the deacon was exceedingly exact and critical, and inclined to be somewhat severe in his judgment.

“ Help yourself, Mr. Flint,” said Philip, who felt that he had a right to be generous, and imagined that the ripe, red, sparkling bunches were as tempting to his companion as they were to himself.

“ No, thank you ; I would much rather not,” replied the deacon, edging away in some alarm.

“ Very well, then ; we have seen all now, I suppose, and may as well leave.”

Mr. Flint carefully re-locked the doors and the front gate, and having parted with Philip in High Street, took the keys back to Mr. Staggers.

Three or four days afterwards, Philip was sitting in his room in a state of considerable embarrassment. He held in his hand a letter received that morning from Kate Vaveley. They were engaged to be

married in September, and Kate, with a view to certain furnishing arrangements, had made inquiries touching the number of windows, and the dimensions of various rooms, in the chapel-house, and several other particulars respecting it, which Philip, having only paid it one visit, and writing from recollection, felt quite unable to answer. Mr. Staggers had not given up the keys, or he might have gone at once and made the required measurements. Could anything be more perplexing and vexatious? How much longer was he to wait, he wondered. He began to think he had submitted too long already to Mr. Staggers' contemptuous treatment. It was high time he began to display a little more spirit.

There was a tap at the door at this moment, and immediately afterwards Mr. Flint entered, with the keys in his hand.

"I have been to him again, this morning, sir," he said. "I told him it was impossible you could wait any longer; and here they are. He has given them up at last!"

Philip's face was radiant with pleasure.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Flint, for your kind exertions," he said warmly.

"I have only done what I consider my duty," replied the deacon.

When he had gone, Philip repaired at once to the chapel-house, and satisfied himself as to the points raised in Kate's letter. And now he began to go there every day, and became busy, overlooking a man sent down by a London upholsterer, under whose hands the place was speedily transformed into a comfortable habitation. If the sense of proprietorship was strong in Philip at this time, the reader will forgive him the weakness. He was himself amused by the frequency with which he locked and unlocked the front gate, and by his vague dread of intrusion. He never once laid down the keys even for a moment, lest they should mysteriously disappear, but kept them in his pocket, and at night carefully locked them in a drawer at his lodging.

There were many hampers to unpack,

containing presents from relatives and friends ; the fruit in the garden to gather for preserving ; and the garden itself to be made trim ; so that those days were most laborious.

The Grange Street people were now fully aware that Mr. Holland was going to be married. Some little curiosity, therefore, naturally prevailed respecting the lady who was to be his wife. At present, all that was known regarding her was that at Davenstone she was active and useful among the young, the poor, and the sick. It was supposed, as a matter of course, that she was a Dissenter ; for the young minister, on entering public life, would assuredly beware of offending the respectable prejudices of the class to whom he was to look for support. There were some who were extremely anxious for fuller information upon this important subject ; and foremost among these was Mrs. Copperfox.

One day, Philip making a call at the villa, that lady seized the opportunity to slake her thirst for knowledge.

"I feel sure that I shall like Mrs. Holland very much, when she comes amongst us," she said, with an insinuating smile.

"I hope so, indeed, Mrs. Copperfox," was the visitor's rejoinder. "Miss Vaveley is a general favourite at Davenstone, and, I trust, will win golden opinions here also."

"I am so impatient to see her," said the sly woman. "Perhaps Miss Vaveley would like to pay Oxbury a visit before she is married? She might wish, you know, Mr. Holland, to become acquainted with us all before that happy event takes place. If so, sir, I am sure I should be very glad if she would make our poor house her home during her stay in the town, if the young lady would not mind sleeping with my niece, Miss Chingford."

"Thank you, Mrs. Copperfox," said Philip; "I will not fail to let Miss Vaveley know of your kind invitation."

He felt quite sure, however, that it would not be accepted, and indeed it was not.

Mrs. Copperfox continued to ply the

young man with various questions, to which he returned guarded replies. She seemed determined, for reasons of her own, to lay him and his *fiancée* under obligations. She was anxious to learn the extent of the young couple's resources. Among other proposals of hers, was one that she should lend them a few chairs and a table towards furnishing their house. This offer Philip politely declined, and, by way of changing the subject, talked about the fruit he had that day been gathering in the chapel-house garden. In an access of good nature, Mrs. Copperfox offered to boil it down and preserve it for him. The minister thanked her, adding that it would be taken as a favour if she would.

On the following morning Mr. Holland received a letter from Dr. Curler, his old tutor, stating that on account of a domestic misfortune that had happened, he would not be able to come to Oxbury in August, as he had arranged to do, but would fulfil his engagement in the following month. Thus, much to the minister's mortification,

his ordination would have to be postponed to a date subsequent to his marriage.

To arrange for that marriage was now the most pressing business. It had long since been decided that the ceremony should take place in St. Peter's Church, Davenstone, where Kate was accustomed to attend service. As Philip was inexperienced, and had no adviser whom he could depend upon at Grange Street, he thought he had better consult the Rector of Oxbury.

Accordingly, on that evening he took his way, with some misgiving and anxiety, along High Street, and rang the bell at the Rectory door. The servant, when she appeared, told him that Mr. Maxforth was in, and she ushered him into the library. Here sat the Rector, who now rose, shook hands with the abashed and flurried visitor, and asked him to take a chair.

"I have come, Mr. Maxforth," said Philip, in a hesitating manner, "to—to ask your advice."

"I am very glad to see you," returned

the Rector, seating himself at his desk, and preparing to listen attentively.

“I am going to—to be married,” continued the young minister, finding the words much more difficult to utter than he had expected.

Mr. Maxforth said nothing, but waited to hear further particulars.

“I want you, if you please,” continued Philip, endeavouring to shake off his nervousness, “to publish the banns in church next Sunday morning.”

“Certainly,” said the Rector, with some little wonder in his own mind, nevertheless—since he supposed the lady also was a Dissenter—as to what the Grange Street people would have to say about the proceeding.

“Am I right to trouble *you* with this request, Mr. Maxforth?” asked the visitor anxiously. “I ought, perhaps, to have gone to the parish clerk?”

“It does not signify at all,” returned the Rector politely. “Our parish clerk does usually attend to such matters, it is true ;

but I am very pleased, Mr. Holland, to make your acquaintance. This is our first meeting. I trust we shall see each other often."

The Rector little thought that future events would link himself and his visitor together somewhat closely.

"May I ask what is your Christian name?" he continued, taking a pen and preparing to write.

"Philip," said the young minister.

Mr. Maxforth wrote it upon the paper carefully.

"And the lady's name?" he asked.

"Katharine Vaveley."

"And the parish?"

"St. Peter's, Davenstone."

"Very good, Mr. Holland; the matter shall be attended to," said the Rector, laying down his pen when these particulars had been duly recorded. "I will send you the certificate of the publication of the banns in due course."

"Thank you, Mr. Maxforth. I shall have left Oxbury for a short time. May I

ask you kindly to post it after me, addressed ' Hampton Street, Davenstone ?' ”

“It shall be done,” said the Rector. “The certificate shall be in your hands on the Monday morning.”

Very soon afterwards the minister took his leave ; and Mr. Maxforth, as he closed the outer door upon him, again wondered what the Grange Street people would have to say when they came to hear about the publication of the banns.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE.

MR. COPPERFOX was standing at the window of his back sitting-room, one Sunday morning, about ten days subsequently to Philip's call upon the Rector, looking with pride and satisfaction upon the peaches ripening in his garden. He and Mrs. Copperfox had just come home, after attending morning service at Grange Street; and the latter was now upstairs, divesting herself of her outdoor gear. Miss Chingford had not as yet entered the house. Departing for once from her custom, that young lady had, on this particular morning, attended service at the parish church. Her uncle and aunt had not quite approved of her going there,

instead of accompanying them, as she usually did, to chapel; but this was a special occasion among the Church people of Oxbury; the sermon was to be preached by an eloquent dignitary from London; and Miss Chingford having been urged by a lady friend to go and hear him, they had yielded a reluctant consent. Mr. Copperfox was now awaiting her return with some impatience, for the walk home had been a long one, the dinner hour had arrived, and he was hungry. At length came her welcome knock at the front door, which the servant promptly answered.

"Where is my aunt?" he heard Miss Chingford ask the maid with a quick, eager voice; and on receiving the reply that her mistress was upstairs, his niece flew up to her. "She has got something out of the way to tell, I'll be bound," he said to himself.

Presently he heard his wife and niece hastening impetuously down the stairs; and the next moment Mrs. Copperfox burst into the room, almost dragging her niece after her.

“Well,” she said, addressing her husband, “we have got the most astounding piece of news to tell you that you ever heard in all your life. Mary has just been telling me—Oh! the sly, unprincipled wretch! I couldn’t have believed it of him.” She sank into a chair, entirely overcome for a moment by excitement and passion.

“What is it? Who are you talking about?” cried Copperfox, in some alarm.

“Who am I talking about?” exclaimed his wife; “I am talking about Mr. Holland”—pronouncing the name with an accent of disgust and abhorrence. “He has disgraced himself, and there is nothing for him but ruin.”

“What has he been doing? Be calm, my dear, and explain yourself. I don’t see how it can be as you say. It is not an hour since we were listening to his sermon. There was nothing amiss in that. We conversed with several people after service, you remember, and on our way home. If he had been doing anything scandalous, we

should have been sure to have heard ; but we heard nothing."

" Heard nothing ! No, indeed ; he has taken care to keep it close enough ; but now the whole town will be ringing with it, before another day has passed. Oh ! what a mess he has got himself into ! He shall suffer for it ! A dissenting minister to do such a thing ! I couldn't have imagined it !"

The savage vehemence with which she spoke filled the soul of poor Miss Chingford with dismay. As for Copperfox, he was turning over in his mind all the crimes and misdemeanours he had ever heard of, and wondering which in the long catalogue it was of which Mr. Holland had been guilty. That in some way or other the young minister had committed himself, he was by no means sorry to hear. Fully prepared beforehand, therefore, to condemn him, whatever his offence might be, he said to his wife :

" You have not yet told me, my dear, what it is that he has done."

“Bah! it blisters my tongue to speak of it! Of course we all knew he was going to be married.”

“Yes,” he said, “that was no secret.”

“But,” continued his wife, “none of us dreamed of his taking the course he has. This is what he has done. *He has been asked in church this morning!*”

With her eyes fixed upon her husband, she watched the effect which this startling disclosure produced upon him, and was gratified to find that as his mind was able by degrees to grasp the full extent of the sin which her last sentence indicated, he showed a becoming detestation of it.

“Can it be possible? Who heard this? Mary,” he said, turning to his niece, “did you hear it?”

Miss Chingford was weak enough to feel heartily sorry that she had said a word about the matter. She was far from sharing in the sentiments of her relatives. Nevertheless, there was nothing for it now but to go through with a disagreeable business.

“Yes, uncle,” she said, “I heard it. I was sitting in my friend’s pew in the church, near to one of those great pillars, and wondering to see those spiral grooves that are cut in it, when the clergyman, standing in the reading-desk, said : ‘I publish the banns of marriage between Philip Holland, bachelor, of this parish, and Catharine Vaveley of Davenstone, spinster. This is the second time of asking.’”

“It makes me sick to think of it,” said Mrs. Copperfox, shuddering.

“The ‘*second*’ time of asking, was it?” said her husband, taking no notice of her last remark. “How is it, then, that no one had heard of this until this morning—none of *our* people, I mean.”

“There is very little difficulty in accounting for that,” rejoined his wife. “Mr. Holland has been in the town so short a time that he is as yet unknown to the church people, and the mention of his name would therefore excite no special interest. No one there ever heard the name of Miss Vaveley before. Besides, none but those

sitting close to the reading-desk could catch the names at all, for the clergyman's utterance is indistinct, and the church is unfavourable for hearing.—Oh! the inconsistency—the wickedness of *that man*; I hate him!”

“Well,” said Copperfox, “when we go to the service this evening, I’ll ask him if it is true, and hear what he has to say.”

“Do,” said his wife eagerly; “we will go to the chapel early, and you shall tax him with it in the vestry. We will make him repent of it as long as he lives.”

In pursuance of this design, Copperfox, accompanied by his wife and niece, arrived at Grange Street that evening quite fifteen minutes before service-time. He parted from his womenkind at the front entrance, and they watched him as he walked up in the shadow of the limes, and turned in at the vestry door.

Of the interview which Mr. Copperfox had with the young minister, it is unnecessary to say more than this—that the former learned, beyond all question, that Miss

Vaveley was a Churchwoman, and that Mr. Holland intended to be married in St. Peter's Church, Davenstone, where the banns had been duly published, as well as at Oxbury.

The next morning, Copperfox drove over to Dalwood Farm, in order to talk the matter over with Mr. and Mrs. Todd and their two daughters. Up to this time the farmer's family had continued to speak the praises of Mr. Holland on all occasions. In that respect, indeed, they had left all his other supporters far behind. At no house had he been so frequently a visitor as at theirs : and until within the last few days the Grange Street people were accustomed to ask one another mysteriously, "Which is it to be—Johanna or her sister Esther?"

Events, however, had now taken an unforeseen direction ; and Copperfox, this morning, was anxious to learn in what light they regarded the latest intelligence.

In the large best room he found the two girls.

"Well, Miss Todd," he began, addressing Johanna, "have you heard the news about our young pastor?"

"I have, Mr. Copperfox," she replied sadly, while her complexion took a deeper tinge. Her sister's face, which was turned from them at the moment, was overspread with a crimson blush. "Oh, Mr. Copperfox," Johanna continued, "I am so sorry. I could not at first believe the story, when it was told to me by one of the friends——"

"It is true enough," said Copperfox, "for I was talking to Mr. Holland about it last evening in the vestry."

"Were you? Ah! I fear his marriage will injure him greatly."

"Injure him!" said Copperfox, "I should think it will! Oxbury will be too hot to hold him."

"I hear he starts for Davenstone on Wednesday," said Miss Todd regretfully. "Most likely they will be married next Monday."

"I shouldn't like to stand in his shoes

when he comes back here again," said Mr. Copperfox.

"No doubt he will be very uncomfortable," said Johanna; "but the young lady is the most to be pitied. They say she has troops of friends at Davenstone; I fear she will not find one here."

"Serve her right for marrying him!" said Copperfox.

"Ah! it is a sad affair," said Miss Todd. "Everybody is talking about it already. The church people take his part, and speak up for him well; but almost all our Grange Street people are against it."

"Here's where it is," said Copperfox argumentatively: "Miss Vaveley having been brought up to church, of course she will not attend chapel along with her husband. There is one odd thing to begin with."

"Mr. Holland assured us," said Johanna, "that she would; but I don't know how that might be."

"Well, even if she does," said Copperfox, "see what she will do. She will be want-

ing him to alter this and that in our way of worship ; she will be interferin', and won't let him rest till he preaches in a black gown and introduces the Prayer-book, and makes everything as it is at church."

Johanna's younger sister had been listening to the conversation all this time without saying a word ; but at this point she turned round, and, addressing Copperfox in a somewhat tremulous voice, said :

" I don't think either of them intends anything of that kind, or would ever dream of attempting it. Mr. Holland, I am sure, has no desire to disturb other people, or to offer any violence to their cherished convictions."

" Esther, you don't know anything about it," said her mother sharply, entering the room at this moment. " Good-morning, Mr. Copperfox. Esther, you are not in a position to speak for Mr. Holland ; neither is any of us, for that matter, for after such a shock as he has given us there is nothing too strange to be true."

Mrs. Todd was a small, active woman,

with a sorrowful, anxious, puckered face. She was thorough and vehement both in her love and in her hatred.

"You express my sentiments exactly, ma'am," said Copperfox.

"I very much regret that we cannot put a stop to this affair," said Mrs. Todd.

"So do I, ma'am," said Copperfox.

"I shouldn't so much have minded his marrying a church lady," said Mrs. Todd, "if that had been all ; though that is bad enough, especially when there are young ladies of our own persuasion, any one of them likely to have made him a good, helpful wife. *But the idea of his being married in church, and having the banns published too !*"

Once more her daughter Esther ventured to advocate the cause of the minister.

"Perhaps the young lady's friends wished the wedding to take place in church ; and if so, I think he is to be commended for yielding to their preferences in the matter," she said boldly, but trembling a little.

"Esther," said her mother severely, and

throwing a reproving glance at her, "your brother Tom is in the sitting-room all alone. Go in to him, and keep him company."

Her daughter obeyed without a word of reply or remonstrance; and then Mrs. Todd, Johanna, and Copperfox were free to discuss the transgressions of their pastor without let or hindrance. When at length, after a long and amicable chat, Copperfox took his departure, he was fully persuaded that the loyalty of the farmer's family to Mr. Holland had suffered a severe shaking.

In the course of the day, Copperfox, on one pretext or another, called upon several other church members, who delighted him by their perfect accord with his views, all of them expressing their disapproval of Mr. Holland's conduct in strong terms. So piercing was the general outcry, indeed, and so unsparing the denunciations, that Copperfox believed not only that the minister's procedure could not possibly be defended, but also that every one of his people had utterly forsaken him. The

only check he encountered that day was administered to him by Mrs. Crock. He was driving down High Street in his dog-cart, when he observed that worthy dame in the act of entering her own house on her return from one of her many visits of charity and mercy, and he drew up and called out to her :

“So our minister turns out to be a Churchman in his heart, Mrs. Crock?”

The dame faced round upon him, and assumed an attitude of composed attention. Copperfox proceeded :

“We little thought, when we invited him, that he preached one thing and believed the opposite. Why, he will be turning everything upside down—he and his wife together. We must either submit to have whatever changes Mrs. Holland orders, or else leave the chapel.”

“Mr. Copperfox,” said the dame quietly, “I think it ’ud be better to wait till we see the lady before we pass such remarks as them about her. To speak against her is the fashion just now. One must howl with

the wolves, as the saying is. But how do we know but what the lady is this very minute praying to God to make her a true help-meet for her husband and a blessing to us, his people? Instead of making it our business to inflame bad passions, let us prepare ourselves to give them a welcome and promote their happiness."

"That's all very well," said Copperfox; "but still I can't help thinking mischief will come of it; for people will talk, and we can't prevent them. Good-day, Mrs. Crock." And so saying, he drove off.

At his villa that same evening, Copperfox received a visitor, with whom he had been most impatient to converse upon the subject of the minister's misdeeds. The visitor was Mr. Flint. When he presented himself, the deacon's face was so pallid, and, with the corners of his mouth drawn down, he presented such a lugubrious appearance, that Copperfox and his wife both exclaimed with much concern, "Surely, Mr. Flint, you feel ill, don't you?"

"No, thank you," he replied, "I am

quite well; but I am troubled about this that has come to light with regard to Mr. Holland."

"Ah! no wonder," said Mrs. Copperfox sympathetically, her heart swelling with delight as she found that he regarded the minister's proceedings with disfavour. "Don't you think," she continued, "that we ought to prevent the wedding taking place?"

"We can't do that," replied the deacon. "Had Mr. Holland asked me for my advice, however, I should have tried my utmost to get him not to marry this lady, or, in case he was determined to do that, to marry her as privately as possible. As it is, the publicity of the affair renders it tenfold more intolerable to us."

"Your advice ought to have been asked, of course," said Copperfox, "and also the advice of the other deacon—Mr. Gloss. Is he of the same opinion as you about the minister's conduct?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Flint, "except that he feels it even more keenly than I do,

and expresses himself much more freely upon the subject."

"I can never look on Mr. Holland with any kindness again," said Mrs. Copperfox. "We have done him a great many favours, but we will never do him another. If he were to remain here twenty years I could never regard him as my pastor again—never!"

"Undoubtedly," said the deacon dolefully, "this affair will be unspeakably detrimental to his interests in this place. Indeed, it has completely destroyed his chance of success in Oxbury. I myself can no longer entertain any respect for him, now that he has shown such an utter want of principle. I never could have believed, notwithstanding all he has advanced in conversation at different times, that his views were so lax as this. I have always considered him somewhat latitudinarian, but never supposed he would make an alliance with Babylon. The doctrines and the polity of the Church of England are, in my opinion, so at variance with Scrip-

ture, that it is a dissenting minister's duty to wage an eternal war with her."

"So it is," said Copperfox, rubbing his hands together in great glee.

"Well," said Mrs. Copperfox, her fiery eyes all aglow with the intensity of her feelings, "what our church members have to do under present circumstances is very clear. We must teach Mr. Holland such a lesson as he will never forget. He must be made an example of! A man who does what he has done deserves no pity from any of us."

CHAPTER VIII.

REVOLT.

WHILE Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox and their friends were giving vent to their wrath against the young minister, the culprit himself was quietly completing his preparations.

As yet he was not even aware that the publication of the banns had occasioned any commotion among his flock. He was so much occupied with his own affairs just at this time that since Sunday—the day on which the ferment began—he had made hardly any pastoral visitations, and when he had come in contact with any of the Grange Street people, they had not sufficiently recovered from their astonishment to trust

themselves to speak to him on the all-engrossing subject.

The truth is Mr. Holland had not foreseen nor calculated upon the fierce antagonism his marriage was destined to provoke. Such was his simplicity that he supposed he, like another man, was free to marry the woman of his choice without interference on the part of his people. What reasonable objection could any one possibly raise? he had asked himself. He was about to marry Kate with the full concurrence both of her kinsfolk and his own. He had given her his heart, and she had yielded hers to him in return. What qualification did she lack, pray, that a dissenting minister's wife ought to possess? She was a good girl, discreet and modest. The young man often assured himself that he was looking forward to his married life as calculated not only to crown his own happiness, but also to increase his usefulness and benefit his charge. He had reason to believe that his *fiancée* would prove a helpmate with whom any one in his posi-

tion might be satisfied. Young as she was, had she not long been indefatigable in works of mercy? Had she not found her chief satisfaction in ministering to the sick and in acts of charity to the poor? Satisfied upon these points, Mr. Holland asked himself, "How could I possibly find a more suitable helpmate than this dear girl of mine?"

Kate Vaveley was not a Dissenter, it is true; but in his inexperience the young pastor did not anticipate any serious difficulty at Grange Street on that account. Although she had been trained to regard the rite of baptism from a different point of view to that he had always taken himself, and meant to uphold from the pulpit, he felt sure that this difference of opinion would never bring a shadow across the path which he and she were to tread together, on their way to the clearer light of heaven. What had the people to fear? He contemplated no innovations; Kate contemplated none. Did they wish him to marry a wife who would co-operate with him and

with them in every good work? Then, her great desire was to be of assistance; yes!—and she would be willing to make many sacrifices in order to be of real service. “Thy people,” she had said to him, “shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

Mr. Holland made the mistake of crediting the community to which he belonged with the catholicism of his own nature. He had not learned how bitter is the bondage sometimes enforced by sectarian uncharitableness, nor could he see the fetters with which he himself was bound at Grange Street. Had he at this crisis been more calculating—a little less liberal in his sympathies—shall we say more prudent?—he would doubtless have made other arrangements. As it was, he willingly allowed events to take their own course, believing all would come right eventually. The dear old church in which Kate had worshipped from her childhood with her kith and kin, and in which she desired to be married, was beautiful and grand in his eyes also,

Dissenter though he was ; and he felt no unwillingness to plight his troth at its altar, instead of in the old meeting-house where he himself used to attend. To some this might appear impolitic, injudicious, and wrong ; but to himself it seemed a natural, considerate, and right course to take.

It was a lovely evening in September, and Philip, who had left Oxbury three days previously, was walking up and down the familiar garden-path at Davenstone. Kate was by his side, and they were talking together of the life and work that lay before them. It was the evening before their wedding. Heavy rain had been incessantly falling throughout the day, but it had ceased, and now there was a bright sunshine. Fear and despondency were dispelled from the minds of the young people by the balmy air and the delicious freshness which the showers had imparted to every scent wafted from the flowers around them. As Philip looked up at the myriads of tender tints with which the declining sun lit up the silvery flakes floating

in the sky, and tinging even the bank of cloud upon the horizon with warm, luminous colour, the future appeared to him inviting and even resplendent. No shadow of the coming trouble was in his heart. He was not aware even now of the widespread dissatisfaction of the flock he had left at Oxbury. When bidding adieu to such of his people as had clustered around him on the night before his departure, he had received from them many kind wishes, and, with the sole exception of the senior deacon, none had reproached him or made any complaint. Mr. Larberry had thrown out hints to him on the subject, but had shown the objections to the marriage in so ridiculous a light that the young minister was induced to believe the opposition was of a trivial and evanescent character. "All will be set right," he had said to himself; "one visit from Kate, when I bring her back with me, will remove all their misapprehensions." He had left Oxbury with this conviction, and now, as he and Kate were walking up and down the garden-path, it

was this same expectation that made the future attractive.

“ You don’t think, dear, your people will distrust me because I have not been brought up to think precisely as they do ? ” Kate asked, looking up lovingly into his eyes.

“ I can’t believe that any reasonable man would distrust or dislike you on that ground,” he replied ; “ the idea seems preposterous to me. Whatever grumbling there has been or may be upon that subject must be founded in misconception, ignorance, stupidity, or sheer malice. The good sense of the community, when you become known to them, will put down anything of that kind. I only wish them to become acquainted with you, darling ; they will make an idol of you then, I am sure.”

Mr. Holland was quite sincere in saying this. He no more expected that his wife would ever be subjected to annoyance, or be the mark for scorn, or neglect, or pity, than Kate herself, who was about to marry him on the faith of his representations, expected it. They continued their talk, there-

fore, and laid their plans with all hopefulness and confidence, until at length Violet, looking very bewitching in a little apron, and with her hands covered with flour, came into the garden and asked them, with a saucy look, if they did not think they ought to come and help her mother and herself on such a busy night as this? Then there was a little laughing and fun, and finally they all betook themselves to the house and finished the preparations for the wedding.

That ceremony we will not attempt to describe, but will content ourselves with stating the fact that Mr. Holland and Kate Vaveley were quietly married in St. Peter's Church, the fair bride and her lovely sister being, of course, greatly admired by all beholders.

At Oxbury, in the meantime, there was one of the Grange Street people who was working hard in the interests of the absent pastor, and that was Larberry. The reader, we hope, has not forgotten this individual. Although his name has hitherto been men-

tioned but seldom, he will play a somewhat important part in the events that are about to be chronicled. He was not unsuccessful at this juncture in endeavouring to counteract the influence of Mr. Copperfox and his wife. Larberry was gifted with a ready, persuasive tongue, and was warm-hearted and generous, impetuous and unstable. There was something in the expression of his grey, restless eyes, thin lips, and, indeed, of his sharply-cut face altogether, that proclaimed him the possessor of an unusually active mind ever in search of novelties. Let not the reader be disgusted if we state that he followed the calling of an ironmonger. He certainly turned his occupation to good account at this time, for every customer that entered his shop heard him pronounce a fervid panegyric on behalf of Mr. Holland. Even the matrimonial proceedings of the latter they heard him eulogise with much warmth, and more than one of the minister's flock whose minds had been secretly disturbed and were wavering, were confirmed in their

allegiance by the orations the ironmonger delivered from behind the counter. Sometimes, however, Larberry's efforts in this direction were not so successful. Refusing to be convinced by his arguments, or even to listen to them, many of the church members stubbornly persisted to the last in denouncing their minister. It was when the ironmonger had been sorely chafed by the language of some of these "malcontents," as he called them, who had just left the shop, that he was delighted one day by the entrance of Dame Crock. He hailed her with a cheery salutation.

"You are the right sort," said he heartily; "but as for our people in general I am at this moment out of all patience with them, they are so unreasonable. Some of them have actually been telling me they can't support Mr. Holland any longer because they find he isn't perfect."

"Have they?" remarked the dame, seating herself at the counter, and planting her basket upon her lap; "then you should ha' told 'em they didn't deserve to have a

minister at all, and ought to know the want of one. I would in a minute, for I don't like so much grumbling. 'He that will have a horse without fault, let him go afoot,' as the saying is. As to Mr. Holland not being perfect, at any rate, I think he is nearer to perfection than I am, and that's enough for me."

"And for me, too," said the ironmonger. "I am sure I am satisfied with our pastor on the whole; but unfortunately our people, I am sorry to say, are rather slow of comprehension, and do not discover the value of a minister until he has left 'em for some other sphere of labour. It was so, I remember, in the case of Mr. Bathosley, our former pastor. Complaints were made about him; but now he is gone his memory is cherished by some as of one that was more than mortal."

"I like Mr. Holland quite as much as I did him," said Mrs. Crock candidly. "Mr. Bathosley was a good man. But the fact is, it's Mr. Holland's going to be married in church that's set folks against him. *That*

Mr. Bathosley was not guilty of doin', though as to that, 'better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without one,' as the sayin' is."

"Then you think, Sister Crock, that Mr. Holland has done wrong in marrying that young lady?"

"No, I can't say as I do altogether, if so be as he loves her and she is a Christian person. Marriages are made in heaven, and we must be careful what we say against this one, 'specially when we haven't seen his wife yet."

"Ah! I wish all our friends were as careful as you are," said Larberry. "Some of 'em speak too fast. For instance, there is Albert Winstock, the miller's son, you know; he has been going to great lengths against our pastor; and I believe Mr. Staggers and Mr. Copperfox have been encouraging him to use language stronger than he has hitherto employed."

"Mr. Staggers has no call to make him go against the minister more than he has done," said the dame.

“No, indeed,” returned Larberry, “but just now there are too many of our people who follow the example of Mr. Staggers and Mr. Copperfox. They are making great capital out of our present troubles. And that is not all. They call in question the motives of those of us, Sister Crock, who still continue to support and defend our pastor.”

“That’s just like them,” said the dame ; “ ‘ill-doers are ill-deemers,’ as the sayin’ is, and may I be forgiven if I am too severe upon them.”

She now rose from her seat, adding, “Well, Mr. Larberry, *I* am going to remain true to the minister, let Mr. Staggers and Mr. Copperfox say what they may ; and I am sure *you* do not mean to turn against him, do you ?”

“I should think not, indeed,” returned the ironmonger with decision.

“Well, then, that’s a good hearing ; and when Mr. Holland comes and brings his bride, there will be some at any rate to give them a welcome.”

CHAPTER IX.

“WHAT SHALL WE DO?”

No one as yet had seen the young bride whom Mr. Holland had brought home, and five days had now elapsed since his arrival. It was Sunday morning, close upon the hour for service. Sprinkled among the dark hideous pews of the chapel sat about twenty people, awaiting the entrance of the minister and his wife. Of these twenty several had been in a strait between a wish to show their disapproval of their pastor's marriage by keeping away from Grange Street altogether, and a strong desire, on the other hand, to gaze upon the fair stranger whose coming had occasioned such excitement, and who was certain to make

her first appearance this morning. Curiosity had prevailed over indignation, and they had crept in as if half ashamed of being seen. The great majority of the flock, however, had resolutely kept away.

There was a private entrance to the chapel for the minister, leading from the garden at the back of his house. Pale and downcast, Philip conducted his bride to her pew, and then ascended the pulpit. In the course of the last two or three days, he had been made acquainted with the present views and feelings of his people, and the revelation had, in a manner, stunned and paralysed him. He sat behind the velvet pulpit cushion and the large crimson-covered Bible, gazing blankly around him, and feeling that all his faculties were blunted by a crushing blow. There, below him, on his right hand, solitary and a stranger, sat Kate. Their honeymoon was scarcely over, and this was her introduction to the sphere for which she had longed! As he looked at her, he saw that she was shivering, and he divined the

desolation that filled her breast. Right before him, and taking care not to meet his eye, gloomy and stern, sat his two deacons, Flint and Gloss. He knew that in their eyes he was as one accursed. *They* had not stayed away ; but it was not from regard to him, but to their office, and their hearts were with his enemies. But Todd ? Yes, the farmer was there, in his corner pew, and Mrs. Todd and the two daughters ; but their faces, he fancied, were not towards him as they had been aforetime. There were two families, however, sitting in their accustomed places, upon whose fidelity he knew he might reckon—at least he hoped so ; Mrs. Crock's and Larberry's. In *their* countenances, at any rate, he read commiseration, sympathy, and loyalty. Others also, with whom he was less acquainted, he believed he might count as supporters ; but at best they were but a handful, dispirited, doubtful and uninfluential. Could any preacher be subjected to a more trying ordeal ? No wonder, with that chill at his heart, and with such an

audience, Philip's sermon was a poor affair and the entire service a miserable failure.

Todd and his family hurried away as soon as the benediction was pronounced, and so did eight or nine others. Larberry, and Mrs. Crock, however, came forward and spoke a few words, Philip telling his wife their names. When they had gone, he introduced her to the two deacons, and then the young couple, the very marrow in their bones frozen by the iciness of their reception, made their escape into their own house.

As a sample of the remarks made by the congregation as they were going home-wards, we will record the conversation which passed between Mrs. Todd and her daughters.

"By the way she carries herself," said Johanna, "any one can see that she is every inch a lady."

"All the worse for her," said Mrs. Todd. "The gentlefolks have all left; and as Mr. Stagers and his daughters and Albert Winstock and his wife are so much against

her husband, there is no one amongst us that she can make a friend of."

"I am very sorry for her," said Esther. "I have been told that she had many dear friends at Davenstone, and that they were very fond of her. She will find out the difference here."

"Well," said her mother sharply, "she has married him, and she must put up with the consequences."

"I wonder where it will end," said Johanna.

"I think," replied her mother, "Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss and the others are going to do something or other, and Mr. Holland will have to leave."

When the minister and his wife were seated at dinner that day, the thoughts passing through the minds of each were sufficiently gloomy to make it an uncomfortable meal. What a rude awakening it was for Kate from all her day-dreams! How different was the actual relationship between her and her husband's people from that she had pictured to herself! How

mortifying to find that instead of being at once accepted as their pattern and leader, the great majority of them had constituted themselves her censors, and would sit in judgment upon her every word and deed ! The unpopularity of her husband—the smallness of the congregation—the undisguised vulgarity of some of the people—these facts, revealed to her for the first time this morning, were very unlike the visions she had seen while in the dear old home at Davenstone ; and it is not surprising that the tears started to her eyes, and that her cheeks were flushed with vexation and disappointment. As for Mr. Holland, he told himself that he had not been so straightforward as he ought to have been ; and his self-flagellation was most rigorous in consequence. He despised himself for the share he had unwittingly taken in bringing about this state of things through being wanting in candour and courage. He, too, had expected a different beginning to this ; but, circumstances being as they were, he thought there was no time like

the present for making a confession to his wife.

"Did you notice that empty pew facing yours, on the opposite side of the chapel?" he asked.

"No," she replied coolly; "I saw nothing but the pulpit, and I noticed nobody but you, throughout the service."

"I thought you might have remarked it," said her husband apologetically. "It was right before your eyes. How bare it looked! That is Mr. Staggers' pew."

"It is Mr. Staggers who has always been opposed to you, is it not?" said Kate.

"Yes. I received a letter from him just previous to my settlement here, stating that he represented an influential minority who were adverse to the invitation I had received, and threatening me with certain pains and penalties if I did not re-consider my decision. Mrs. Staggers also wrote to the same effect, and so did one of the daughters. They tried to frighten me."

This was news to Kate, and she was now all attention.

"Albert Winstock sent me a similar letter, although he is not a church member," continued her husband. "So did three or four others, one of them writing anonymously. It was very wrong of me, dearest, not to have told you this before, but I could not bring myself to tell you."

Mrs. Holland was not blaming him in her heart ; she was inwardly burning with wrath against her husband's enemies.

"How dare they," she exclaimed, "when you had been properly and regularly invited ! What right had they to do such a thing ? It was wicked of them in the extreme. They ought to have acquiesced in the will of the church."

"Certainly they ought," said he. "Well, dear, I sent a courteous but firm reply to Mr. Staggers, as the representative of 'the opposition ;' but to the other letters I returned no answer. I had been advised to treat them with silent contempt, and I did so. There again I was wrong. I regret that I did not at least acknowledge the receipt of all the letters to which names were appended."

"I must say it served them right," said Kate. "It taught them a lesson, I hope, and it will be a long time before they lay themselves open to be treated in a similar manner again."

"It will be uphill work for us, Kate, it is clear," said her husband. "You saw what the congregation was this morning. They evidently mean to drive us away."

"And do you mean to let them drive us away?" said Kate.

"No," he replied, "I do not. I mean to fight my way through it all. If their cause is more righteous than ours, I am greatly mistaken. I believe we have right on our side, and I shall have to suffer a very great deal before my conviction is shaken. Some day, perhaps, they will come to own they are wrong."

"I would not give in to such wicked people," said Kate, with fire in her eyes, "while there is any breath left in me. If it killed me, I would resist them to the very last gasp."

During that week no call was made at

“the chapel-house” by any of the leading people of Grange Street, and Mrs. Holland began to see that she need expect none—none, that is, from any whom she could regard as equals. One day, her husband asked her if she would go with him to call upon Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox, by way of commencing a round of visits.

“But it is her place to call upon me first,” said Kate.

“Never mind that, dear. These people don’t know, perhaps, what the usages of society are, and they may be expecting you.”

“It isn’t because they don’t know better, I feel sure,” said his wife.

“Well,” he replied, with a smile, “if the mountain won’t come to Mahomet, let Mahomet go to the mountain.”

So Kate waived her objections, and went with him ; but they did not stay long at the villa, for Mrs. Copperfox clawed the minister’s wife, figuratively speaking, like a wild cat. They went to two or three other houses afterwards, but did not fare very well at any of them.

A visit, however, which Mrs. Crock paid them about this time, afforded the minister and his wife no little consolation.

"Excuse me, mum," said the dame to Kate, "but would you kindly accept of this nosegay?" And she took from her basket a large bunch of flowers, and presented it to her.

Kate thanked her for the simple present, and then the dame proceeded as follows :

"I can't think, mum, what can have come to the people. I am sure their hearts can't be right, or they wouldn't act as they do. I am ashamed of them, especially them as say they've had a good edicashun. It's Mr. Staggers' doing, mum. He started them off. I can't think that he's a Christian. He wouldn't do as he does, if he was. And him an old man, too. 'Grey hairs are death's blossoms,' as the sayin' is, and he ought to be giving his mind to better things, and preparing for his end. He has sadly fallen from grace. He stood very high in the church at one time. His prayers used to be beautiful, and not a dish

would he let his servants wash on Sundays. Everything was put away till the Monday morning, he was so particular. But I'm afraid he never was converted after all, and was only deceiving himself. There is a good many of our people as is deceiving theirselves, I think. Such had better look at home before they condemn other people. I'm sure I wish I was half as good as some people I have heard of, as were members of the Church of England. The clergymen are very pious men, most of them, I believe. Mr. Maxforth, the Rector, is a good man, I'm sure. My Ellen's cousin lived at service with one clergyman, and if ever there was a kind man it was him, and no mistake."

Before the dame could proceed further, a knock at the front door caused Kate to look out of the window to see who the visitor might be. It was Mr. Flint. She therefore took Mrs. Crock into the garden, in order to leave the sitting-room clear for the deacon and her husband. Mr. Flint was shown into the sitting-room by the

servant. His brow was clouded, and his square face wore, the minister thought, an expression even sterner and more unpromising than ever.

After they had been talking of certain church matters a considerable time, Mr. Holland said :

“ You perhaps remember that my ordination was postponed till the latter end of this month, owing to Dr. Curler’s not being able to come to Oxbury last August, as he had previously arranged to do ? ”

“ Yes,” said the deacon curtly, “ I remember.”

“ The time draws very near,” said Philip, who was determined, for reasons of his own, that none of his plans should be put aside, if he could help it. “ We should begin making our arrangements.”

“ Don’t you think, sir,” said Mr. Flint, “ that the ceremony had better be postponed for the present ? ”

“ On no account. It has been postponed once already ; besides, Dr. Curler’s engagements are so numerous, that probably no

other date would suit him. What sufficient reason is there for postponing it?"

"Well, sir, for one thing, the church members are so unsettled, and would not look on it with favour; secondly, the funds are so low that we can scarcely support the expense."

"As to the first objection," said Philip, "I think my ordination would probably produce a better feeling among the members than prevails at present; and as to the second, I would sooner bear the expense myself than have it postponed."

"Then, sir—excuse me—if it does take place, it must be on the understanding that I take no part in the proceedings."

"Why not? Oh, come, come, friend Flint, don't say so."

"But I *must* say so, sir. My principles will not allow me to have anything to do with the affair. Were I to take any part in it, it would be thought that I approve of what you have done."

"But, Mr. Flint, consider what remarks will be made, if you stand aloof."

"I cannot help that, sir. I could not do what would be construed to be sympathy with you. I am willing to resign my office, and will do so to-morrow, if desired; but I cannot, and will not, take any part in the ordination."

Despite the deacon's obstinacy, Mr. Holland was determined that the event should take place at the time appointed. On the following day, therefore, he made the necessary preparations, and put everything in train for the ceremony.

In the evening Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss were to pay him their weekly visit, to talk over the affairs of the church, as usual.

"Is there anything special in the business to-night?" said Kate to her husband, and trembling as she spoke.

"Not that I am aware of."

"I hope nothing unpleasant will take place," she said anxiously; "but I do dread their coming."

"Their visits are at no time calculated to raise our spirits," he replied; "but I don't

know that we need expect anything to-night more disagreeable than usual.”

Nevertheless they both experienced some slight trepidation when, the hour having arrived, the two deacons were shown into the sitting-room by their little maid. The visitors persisted in sitting as near the door as possible, and vouchsafed nothing but monosyllables to the civil and conventional inquiries made by Mr. Holland and his wife. The simple, womanly heart of the latter yearned to soften their asperity by a trifling act of politeness, which—fond, foolish girl!—she believed would bring a ray of sunshine upon their faces. She asked them to taste her bride-cake!

Titania weaving garlands for the head of Bottom does not suggest a more startling incongruity! It was, however, a straw flung up which served to show which way the wind had set. Mr. Flint pleaded that he had just taken tea, and Mr. Gloss urged that he had the toothache, and that he feared it might aggravate the pain! Being pressed, they at length took a morsel from

the plate, very reluctantly, and, under pretence of eating it, surreptitiously crumbled it on the carpet!

Resisting an inclination to knock their heads one against the other, Mrs. Holland then left the room.

"Mr. Gloss and myself," said Mr. Flint, addressing the minister, "have been conversing together, sir, and we have come to the conclusion that it is our duty to speak to you plainly to-night."

Philip remembered his wife's words with reference to this very visit, and prepared himself to hear something unusually depressing.

"The fact is, sir," continued Mr. Flint, his sour visage lengthening visibly, "we see no probability of your ministry here being attended with any success. Your deplorable marriage has ruined your influence for good in this place for ever. One friend made the remark, the other evening, that even were you to stay here twenty years, they could never regard you as their minister. I and Mr. Gloss think that,

under the circumstances, the best thing is for you to resign. I am very sorry—but that is the advice we both give you."

"Yes," said Gloss, "we are both of one mind in this matter, though you will believe me, Mr. Holland, when I say that it causes us much pain to come to you with such a request. We are obliged, however, to look after the interests of the people, which seem to require a change in the ministry, and therefore we had no option in the matter. Don't suppose, I beg, that we have any ill-feeling against you personally. As a man we love you; and if your ministry is not so profitable as some people might desire——"

"You see, sir," said Mr. Flint, interrupting his brother deacon, "we are losing, I am sorry to say, almost all the best and most valued supporters of the cause in Grange Street. Albert Winstock and several other leading men have declared that they will secede and build another chapel in the town, if you do not immediately resign.

"That threat has been hurled at me once before," said Mr. Holland quietly;

"it was the burden, you remember, of the letters they sent me previous to my settlement here, and which you so vehemently condemned."

"The circumstances are different now, however," said Mr. Flint.

"In other words," replied the minister, "men's passions are excited more generally than before, and on different and totally insufficient grounds. In twelve months they will be ashamed of their present feelings and actions, and you, both of you, will be ashamed of yourselves for having been their agents and tools."

"We are not here, sir, as the tools of any man," said the inexorable deacon, raising his voice; "we are acting on our independent judgment. No one sent us here, nor have we told any one of our purpose. This is a private interview. We wish that your resignation should seem a voluntary thing on your part."

"What my brother says is quite correct," said Gloss, turning to the minister with a bland and condescending air. "We shall

never breathe a syllable of what is passing between us to-night to any living soul; consequently everybody will think that your resignation is your own act. We wish to consult your ministerial character, you being only a beginner."

"Thank you," said Mr. Holland dryly; "that is very considerate of you, I am sure."

"There is one other thing, sir, which I think it my duty to tell you," said Mr. Flint. "It is this: Should you, notwithstanding our advice to the contrary, decide to remain here in defiance of us, we shall then be compelled to proceed to extreme measures. You will then receive a requisition, signed by a great number of church members and seat-holders, and you will be driven away. I hope, however, that for your own sake you will not compel us to resort to that rigorous proceeding, but will quietly resign."

"Were I to give you my answer to-night," said the minister, "I should probably frame it in words I might afterwards

regret. I will, therefore, simply say that I will seriously consider the matter."

"Do, sir, and I hope you will be guided to a right decision," said Mr. Flint.

"Yes," added Gloss, as Mr. Holland let the deacons out at the front door, "we trust you will receive guidance, and that you will come to the conclusion to follow our advice, for your own sake."

When he had closed the door upon his visitors, the minister returned alone to the sitting-room. How should he break the news to his wife? While he was considering, she came in with an anxious face; and when she asked him what had been said, he told her all.

"It is barbarous!" she cried.

Then followed a long silence, which was broken by her husband.

"Mr. Flint said that one person had told him I could never be regarded as their minister, if I stayed here twenty years."

"I can guess who said that," exclaimed she; "it was Mrs. Copperfox."

"I dare say it was."

There was another pause, and then Kate said, her eyes filling with tears :

"What shall we do ?" Her lips quivered, then the tears came fast, and she sobbed aloud. " Oh, how soon for us to break up our home !" she cried.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECTOR'S CALL AT THE CHAPEL-HOUSE.

THE reader has discovered from the foregoing chapters that the Established Church was regarded with no favour at Grange Street. We will now make it our business faithfully to record in what manner that establishment was represented in Oxbury, that it may be seen whether the hostility of Messrs. Flint and Copperfox was justifiable or not. Let it be stated, *imprimis*, that Mr. Maxforth had been the spiritual ruler of the parish for about three years. Let it also be stated that during that period—not a protracted one, it is true—unbroken harmony had prevailed between the Rector, churchwardens, and

parishioners. This may not be much to state, but let the fact be chronicled, and let it stand for what it is worth. We are not at present concerned with what may have happened in other parishes—good, bad, or indifferent; we claim only to be a veracious chronicler of events taking place in Oxbury.

The Rector, furthermore, was possessed of sound learning. He was a fellow of his college, and, young as he was—he had not yet attained thirty years—had become favourably known as the author of several dissertations and works of reference. As a parish clergyman he displayed considerable tact combined with firmness. He thoroughly understood the mind of the laity, and enjoyed their confidence and respect. It would be hard to find a Churchman in Oxbury who did not entirely believe in the sincerity of Mr. Maxforth. They knew that he worked hard in his parish; and when they thought of the number of visits he paid among the poor, and the hours he spent at the bed-

side of the sick, it was a standing wonder to them how he could find time for so much literary work, and for other favourite pursuits in which he indulged in private. Those pursuits were of the most varied character. He dabbled in science, was passionately fond of the fine arts, and in works of a practical, mechanical nature was quite an adept.

We have said that the Rector enjoyed the confidence and respect of the laity. The reason is plain. He displayed no sacerdotalism. His temperament, the wide range of his reading, his knowledge of men, his past training—these had taught Mr. Maxforth to avoid extremes of all kinds; and he was so accustomed on all occasions to say exactly what he meant, and to keep his word when he had pledged it, that men of all shades and ranks in Oxbury and its neighbourhood—the squire at Poppleton Hall, the free-thinking surgeon in High Street, and Briggs the blacksmith, in the lane—all could calculate on the parson's steadfastness and avoidance of eccentricities.

Now Mr. Flint, who lived and moved among these people, had compared the Church of England to Babylon, and had declared it to be a dissenting minister's duty to wage an eternal war with her. Whence had the deacon derived his ideas of that Church? Perhaps from tradition, and from the agents of the Liberation Society. There were in Mr. Flint's home certain ancient pamphlets and sermons containing vigorous denunciations of the parsons of a hundred years since, and these he diligently read and digested. The deacon's father and grandfather, moreover, had been staunch Dissenters before him, and he had been thoroughly indoctrinated in their views, which he still held in a modified form. And the lecturers from London and elsewhere, who had so ardently advocated disestablishment in Grange Street, had not always, we regret to say, presented the exact truth regarding the "State Church" before their audiences. Consequently there was much ignorance and misconception prevailing among those

who only heard one side of the question.

Mr. Maxforth was not entirely unacquainted with the arguments of the recusant portion of the population of Oxbury, for some of the Dissenters were bold enough, when the Rector visited at their houses, to ventilate their views, and he had not scorned to discuss the subject with them. It should be stated that he by no means confined his pastoral visits to Church people and members of his congregation. He called upon all his parishioners indiscriminately, and, especially in cases of sickness, recognised the equal claim which all parties and sects had upon his spiritual offices. One day he had been drawn into an "amicable controversy" with a member of Mr. Holland's chapel on the "advantages of the voluntary system," and had returned to the Rectory somewhat fagged and weary. A cup of tea refreshed him, and he strolled out upon the lawn. Here he saw Reuben Crock, busy once more among his flower-beds as a substitute

for the regular gardener, who was again a martyr to rheumatism. A quiet talk ensued, and at length it transpired, in answer to one of the Rector's inquiries, that the minister of Grange Street was ill.

"Ill!" cried Mr. Maxforth, "I am very sorry to hear that. I hope he is not confined to his bed?"

"Yes, sir, he be; he took to his bed two days ago. It's no particular disease, sir; he seems to have trouble in his mind; *that* has brought it on; but he be a trifle better to-day."

Reuben was correct. That interview with the two deacons, wherein they had requested him to resign, adding that unless he did so, a requisition would be sent to him and he would be driven away—that interview had left its mark upon Mr. Holland, and he was now in the condition named by this good labouring man. Dame Crock's husband did not mention that interview as accounting for the illness, for the simple reason that he knew nothing about it; but from the particulars and hints he let

fall, the Rector divined the exact situation of affairs. When he went into his library he told himself that it was his duty to visit the sick parishioner. He had not seen the minister since that occasion when the latter had called at the Rectory to ask him to publish the banns. Several weeks had passed since then—weeks that had been spent by himself in quiet labours in the parish and in the study, with hardly a care or sorrow to disturb the even current of his life; whilst upon that fellow-worker in Grange Street he knew many hard and crushing strokes had fallen. Yes, assuredly it was his duty to call upon him, and to say a kind word or two to give him comfort. He spoke to his uncle the same evening about the matter, and told him he meant to go; and Mr. Hartleby who had been made acquainted with the circumstances also, commended his resolve.

Mr. Holland, who of course knew nothing about the Rector's intention to pay him a visit, was sufficiently recovered on the following afternoon to come downstairs.

He still looked pale and ill, but the worst was now over, and he only needed rest and quiet, and cheerful society, to complete his recovery. He had now quite made up his mind what course to pursue in the matter about which Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss had spoken. For a day or two he had been undecided. Sometimes he had thought he ought to yield to the wishes of the people. He told himself he had made a mistake ; he was unacceptable to them ; it was hopeless to imagine he could ever do any good at Grange Street ; and he must not let any supposed private interests of his own stand in the way of the general welfare of the community. He had better go ; and begin again, under less unfavourable auspices, somewhere else. To this view Kate also was at first somewhat inclined. But afterwards the instinct of self-preservation triumphed, and considerations that may be deemed somewhat more selfish determined him to try conclusions with his opponents. And again his wife gave her approval to his purpose. Now, therefore, come what

might, he meant to wait and work on, in the hope that his prospects would brighten eventually. The belief, too, that there was much latent sympathy felt for him in Oxbury, and that he was "more sinned against than sinning," notwithstanding all his faults, lent a charm to the situation, and, that afternoon, as he sat pillowed upon the sofa in the sitting-room, gathering fresh strength and vigour every hour, "the light of battle" was in his eyes, and he had renounced and repudiated the thought of flight or surrender.

Kate sat by his side, the traces of suffering and anxiety visible in her pale face, yet bright and cheerful to-day, as she tended her husband and noted the satisfactory progress he was making towards health. She, too, felt more hopeful now, and was quite as resolute as he. There was a third person in the sitting-room; it was Violet. She had been a visitor at the chapel-house for the past two weeks, and the minister's wife had found her sister's society a great comfort during the recent troubles. Violet's

large dark eyes had shed many tears of sympathy ; and the warmth with which she had espoused the cause of her brother-in-law had soothed the minister's mind very materially. However distressing, therefore, Mr. Holland's official life might be, in his domestic circle he found support and consolation.

When Violet came to the chapel-house she had brought news with her from Davenstone. Mrs. Vaveley, who had long been in delicate health, and had frequently been recommended by her physician to try the more bracing air of the north, had at last made up her mind to do so, and had taken a house for an indefinite period at Seftwick, a sea-side village a few miles from Scamborough. The change thus contemplated formed an agreeable subject of conversation this afternoon, Kate rallying her sister regarding Mr. Collington's attentions, and saying she hoped Violet would not be inconsolable when removed to so great a distance from him. Before she could reply, an exclamation from the minister startled them both.

“ Mr. Maxforth, the Rector, is coming !” he cried ; and the next instant there was a ring at the front door.

When the maid ushered the Rector into the little room, Mr. Holland stood up with a faint smile, and, after the customary salutations, introduced his wife and sister-in-law.

“ I must apologise for having so long delayed to call,” said Mr. Maxforth politely, but with some restraint. “ You and I, Mr. Holland, have met before, and I am now very pleased to make Mrs. Holland’s acquaintance.”

“ You are very kind, sir,” said the minister and his wife, in a breath.

When they were all seated, the Rector continued, still with a slight abridgment of his usual liberty of utterance :

“ I heard that you had been ill ” (addressing Philip) “ but am very glad to find you are better.”

“ Yes, sir,” said Kate, “ my husband has been seriously unwell, but was able to come downstairs to-day.”

As a matter of course none of the party alluded to the critical position of Mr. Holland's affairs, or dropped the faintest hint at the connection between his illness and that memorable interview with the deacons. It was not even supposed by Kate or her husband that the visitor knew anything about their difficulties.

"I trust, that by God's blessing, you may soon be restored to your usual health," said Mr. Maxforth to the invalid; and then turning to Kate, he added: "I understand you are from Davenstone, Mrs. Holland?"

"Yes, sir," she answered with a smile, "that is my native city."

"I have some acquaintance with it," remarked the Rector, "but it is some years since I was there. Mr. Sparrow is the Vicar of St. Peter's, is he not?"

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Kate with delight, "he was my clergyman at home, and I have attended that church ever since I was a child."

"I knew him at Oxford," said Mr. Max-

forth, "we were friends there ; but I have not seen him for some years."

Then there was a pause, and the Rector glanced furtively at Violet.

"Davenstone is a fine city, sir," remarked Mr. Holland feebly from the sofa.

"It is indeed," assented the visitor, still with that strange curb and check upon his words. "I thought it one of the most quaint and interesting places I had ever seen."

"You have read some of the legends connected with it, no doubt, sir?" asked the minister.

"Yes ; they are very striking."

"We are very sorry to hear, sir," said Kate, "that my mother has made up her mind to leave Davenstone."

"Mamma has been advised to live in the north of England for the sake of her health," explained Violet, who, like the Rector, did not feel quite composed, and who blushed crimson at the sound, low and sweet though it was, of her own voice.

"You will very much regret leaving

your native town, will you not ?" asked Mr. Maxforth.

"I shall indeed," assented Violet, blushing again as the Rector turned his gaze upon her.

"Will your new home be very far away ?"

"At Seftwick, a sea-side village near Scamborough. It is rather a pretty place," said Violet.

They all continued talking thus for some time, and at last Mr. Maxforth rose, and a little while afterwards took his leave. He went home and shut himself up in the library. Here he sat thinking about the interview, and the conversation at the chapel-house, turning it over and over in his mind and wishing that his own share in it had been of a more brilliant character. He was conscious that he had been in some degree discomposed. He hoped Miss Vaveley had not thought him stupid. He had talked with handsome women before, and had felt no perturbation, no quickening of the pulse. But the minister's

sister-in-law!—he must not look in that direction. Yet he would call on Mr. Holland again, to make enquiries after the invalid. That was a duty. Thus the Rector settled the matter in his own mind.

A second call was accordingly made at the chapel-house two days afterwards. Mr. Holland had quite recovered, and had gone out to see some of his people. Mrs. Holland and Violet were at home, and with them the Rector had some talk; the musical voice and dark eyes of the younger and unmarried girl contributing not a little to the prolongation of the visit.

On the following day Violet left Oxbury, Mrs. Vaveley having written to say she required her assistance in preparing for their new home at Seftwick.

CHAPTER XI.

RENOUNCED.

MR. HOLLAND, as we have seen, had resolved that his home should not be broken up. He had decided to remain, and to see if time would not work some changes in his favour. He did not disguise from himself that his reasons for coming to this determination were of a selfish and private character. He well knew that the forfeiture of his pulpit at Oxbury would be tantamount to official extinction. The dissenting world would certainly not trouble itself with the details concerning the Grange Street people; and strangers who might hereafter learn that he had been compelled to fly from Oxbury at the outset of his career, would probably think he had been

guilty of immorality. If he resigned he must be prepared to abandon his vocation altogether. And he told himself that his opponents knew this. They knew that to degrade him in the manner they proposed would ensure the failure of his hopes and his utter ruin as a minister. Possibly that might be a small matter to them provided they gained the end they had in view. Mr. Holland, however, did not now mean them to gain that end if he could help it. He assured himself that he did not mean to be sacrificed thus, merely because they happened to be opinionated and quarrelsome and intolerant. He would wait and give them time for reflection. Since he did not deserve the obloquy with which he was visited, he would live it down. Even if the disaffected party should bring to bear against him that terrible *ultima ratio* of which Mr. Flint had spoken, he told himself that he would not yield. When he did retire from the town he would go of his own free will; he would never be driven away ignominiously.

It was a day or two after his mind had been made up upon this matter that the minister, who had his wife with him at the time, made a call upon Larberry, who did not live at his place of business in High Street, but in a snug cottage just outside the town. It was late in the evening when the call was made, and, business being over for the day, the ironmonger was at home. He it was who opened the door for them, and a smile of genuine pleasure spread over the good man's face as he welcomed the visitors in. There seemed no pretence about Larberry. He was apparently a true and thoroughgoing admirer of the present régime. The same may be said of his wife also, though she had not the generous unselfish disposition of her husband. Mrs. Larberry was a large-featured, large-boned woman, whose sorest troubles arose from her husband's thoughtless good-natured prodigality and the weak state of her own health.

"I should think, sir," she said, addressing Mr. Holland, "that no one in your

position was ever so badly treated as you are. I am sure if I had to meet with your trials in my feeble state of body it would lay me up altogether."

"Very likely it would, my dear," replied her husband blandly. "But then you see you would not be in your right place in such a position, and Mr. Holland is. Mr. Holland knows that he has justice and truth with him, and that conviction supports him I have no doubt. He knows, too," continued the ironmonger, "that he has my best wishes that he may be able to make a stand and successfully overcome all his enemies at last."

"Yes, Mr. Larberry," returned the minister, bowing; "I know that you are a sincere friend."

"You may depend upon it he is," said Mrs. Larberry. "There's nothing my husband wouldn't do to serve Mr. Holland," she continued, turning to Kate. "He would give him the last penny he had in the world, and work himself to death to do him a service. And he is not a man to

be turned aside by anything Mr. Staggers or Mr. Copperfox or any of the rest can say, I assure you."

"I should hope not indeed," said Larberry. "How Mr. Copperfox and his wife, sir, can speak against you as they do, and yet keep coming to Grange Street and making a show of being friendly to the cause, I can't understand."

"Perhaps it is that they may bring the rest of the church members round to their side," suggested Mrs. Larberry.

"I believe that *is* the reason," replied the ironmonger warmly, "and I'm afraid they have been too successful already. In my opinion they and Mr. Gloss between them have half corrupted the Todds."

"Oh! I hope not," exclaimed Kate.

"I do indeed, ma'am," replied Larberry.

"I have fancied they have not been quite so friendly of late," said Mr. Holland.

"As a matter of fact, they are not so friendly, sir; and the parties we have to thank for it, in my humble opinion, are Mr. Copperfox, Mr. Gloss, and Amos Flint."

"Amos Flint? who is he?" inquired Kate, turning to her husband.

"He is the deacon's cousin," he replied.

"Amos used to avoid the family," said Mrs. Larberry, who was enjoying the gossip immensely, and had even forgotten her bodily ailments for the time; "but I suppose, Mrs. Holland, he has got over his disappointment now, and can talk to them without feeling it too keenly."

"My wife is alluding to a little love affair of his, ma'am," said Larberry in explanation. "Amos was paying his addresses to Johanna Todd some time ago——"

"They were engaged to be married, my dear," said his wife, interrupting.

"We are not sure of that," returned Larberry, with a judicial air. "People said so, but we have had no proof of it. Any way, sir, the thing came to an end. It is understood that Johanna refused him. That was just before you came, sir."

"We don't know why it was broken off," said Mrs. Larberry in an undertone, to the

minister's wife. "Some say one thing, others another. But I hear he has now taken up with another young person."

"Indeed!" returned Kate, *sotto voce*. "Is she one of our people?"

"No, ma'am; she doesn't come to Grange Street. She doesn't live in Ox-bury, but at Wickle, a village about six miles from here. Her father is a farmer, and she has some money of her own. It would be a capital match for Amos, if she will have him."

"But I hope she will not," said Larberry. "In my opinion, she deserves a better husband than Amos, who perhaps has an eye only to her money."

"Why should he?" asked his wife. "I am sure Mary Gray is a girl any man might love for her own sake."

"Well, that's true enough," returned the ironmonger. "You see, sir, she is really a good girl, is Mary Gray."

During that week the minister had opportunities of feeling the pulse of several more of the Grange Street people; and

finding that they considered him harshly dealt with by the deacons, and that they were disposed to resent the severity those officials had displayed, the young man was the more convinced that he ought to make a stand and fight out the battle to the end, whatever that end might be. Let us not blame him too severely.

The present writer is bound to admit that at this time Mr. Holland carefully observed the well worn maxim, "*Multa audi, loquere pauca.*" He uttered no complaint, he abused nobody, and his words relating to his own affairs were few and well chosen. Of course there were many who misunderstood him, for "confidence is a plant of slow growth." It is probable, such was the irritation in men's minds, that any words from him would do more harm than good.

A stormy church meeting held about this time by no means tended to diminish the minister's difficulties. He was watched by keen and unfriendly eyes, and now and then from inexperience he committed a

blunder which was made the most of, and, in the present temper of the people, went sadly against him. The technicalisms which Mr. Bathosley used to have at his fingers' ends, were stones of stumbling to the neophyte.

Still the young man, feeling that retreat would be cowardly, held on his way. And despite the obstacles thrown in his path by Mr. Flint, he now carried his point as to his ordination. The ceremony was of serious consequence to him, no doubt; of as much consequence, indeed, as his coronation is to an emperor, or his enthronement to a bishop. This little church at Grange Street was Mr. Holland's kingdom; his pulpit was his throne. It is true his reign might be a brief one. It might be ended in a few days to come, for no throne was ever more insecure than his. Nevertheless, it is something to be a king even when the insurgents are clamouring at the gates, and threatening to hurl you from power. It is sweet to be invested with the symbols of royalty, though the

next hour may find you slain by the swords of the rebels! Yes, Dr. Curler came up from Bulton accompanied by Mr. Lingwood, and they, assisted by friendly neighbouring pastors, ordained the young minister. Large bills, as well as printed circulars, had invited Oxbury and the vicinity to the ceremony; but the audience was depressingly small, comprising Larberry and Mr. and Mrs. Crock, who came to assist and encourage; Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox, who came to sneer; Mr. Todd, who came to scowl; and about a score of persons besides, among whom we must not omit to notice Mr. Flint, who hovered about like a thundercloud. Decorous and impressive was the ordination in some degree, nevertheless.

Mr. Lingwood said he had known the young minister for ten years; and he gave him an excellent character. He also bade the people "encourage him." Encourage him? How much unconscious satire there was in those words! Mr. Holland, sitting under the pulpit with his head bowed down,

as they were announced for the preacher's text, thought they conveyed the finest irony he had ever heard. But stay. At any rate, there were a few who honestly and heartily did encourage him—the two Crocks and Larberry, [to wit. The ironmonger provided, mainly at his own expense, a bountiful repast in the schoolroom for such as chose to partake of it. Mr. Lingwood chose to do so for one. Dr. Curler said he was obliged to leave for London, and could not stay. About a dozen church members remained, but the Todds were not among the number. Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss also had been invited, but declined the honour. But the writer has been informed that every one of that dozen persons who partook of the repast in the schoolroom, was true to the core to Mr. Holland.

Now Mr. and Mrs. Todd and Johanna and Esther had seldom been seen at Grange Street of late, whereas formerly they had never missed a single service. They were evidently cooling. The farmer's "women-kind" had all been absent from the chapel

at the ordination. The next day Philip and his wife paid them a visit to ascertain the cause, for Mr. Todd's family were still counted among the minister's adherents, although their support was now merely nominal. The visit was a most dispiriting one, and it may be stated that it proved to be the last Mr. Holland or his wife ever paid the family.

On this occasion, when Mrs. Todd and her daughters opened their lips, it was only to utter sounds of lamentation and woe, to eulogise the minister's opponents, and to disparage his friends. It is not surprising that all this jarred painfully upon the nerves of the visitors. Mr. Todd sat by in silence, merely rubbing his fat person, and wagging his beard approvingly, while his womenkind were speaking. He opened his lips when Philip and Kate rose to leave :

"If people think you are not the right man, we can't help it," he said. "They will move 'eaven and earth to drive you away."

Then the visitors left the house, never more to enter it. When they had reached their own home, and Mr. Holland had closed the front door behind him, he said to his wife :

“ We are in a state of siege, Kate ; but there shall be no surrender to the enemy.”

One day Mrs. Holland was alone in the sitting-room, when “ two young ladies ” were shown in by the servant. These “ two young ladies ” were Miss Todd and her sister Esther. Their manner was so friendly and cordial that the minister’s wife, who had feared that they had become alienated, was reassured, and took heart of grace. Johanna came on to the hearth-rug, took up Mrs. Holland’s Persian cat reposing there, and hugged it.

“ You beautiful creature ! ” she said, apostrophising the Persian cat, with another caress.

Kate looked on wonderingly.

“ Is Mr. Holland in ? ” continued Miss Todd, with an abrupt change of manner. “ I want to speak to him, if he is—that is

to say, my sister and I wish to speak to him."

"He is upstairs in his study; I will call him down," replied Kate, more amazed than ever, but yet thinking there could not be anything wrong, as they seemed friendly. "He will be down in one minute," she continued, as she re-entered the sitting-room.

"Really, is it not a lovely creature, Esther?" cried Miss Todd with enthusiasm, holding up the Persian cat in her sister's face, after she had buried her own nose in its "fur" for the third time.

"It is indeed," replied Esther nervously.

"And how gentle she is, isn't she? She doesn't attempt to scratch me, however much I pull her about," said Johanna, stroking the cat's back with her gloved hand admiringly.

Mr. Holland's step was heard in the passage at this moment. She hurriedly put down the cat upon the carpet, there was a rustle of drapery, a straightening of the

back, and Johanna Todd was changed instantaneously, as by an enchanter's hand, into another person.

"We are come," she said, addressing Mr. Holland, "to tell you plainly that we were deceived in you when we gave you our support. Our eyes are opened now, and we are convinced you are not suited to this place."

So astounded was the minister by this unexpected onslaught, that he was positively unable to speak a single word.

"You need not think I am speaking for myself alone," continued Miss Todd tartly; "I am telling you what is my sister's opinion also. Esther, your opinion is the same as mine, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Esther.

"It is my mother's opinion too, and my father's," continued Miss Todd; "in fact, we have come here by their desire—haven't we, Esther?"

"Yes."

"Now you know our mind," said Miss Todd. "We don't like you, and don't

profit by you, and we shall not give you our support any longer."

The minister had now found his tongue, and asked this strong-minded girl a few questions. Kate also added her reproaches. It was all in vain. As the two sisters were shown the front door, the parting words of the strong-minded girl were :

"You know our mind now, Mr. Holland. We have renounced you for ever."

CHAPTER XII.

A MANIFESTO.

MR. HOLLAND, having shown the two sisters out of the house, sat down to reconsider his position very seriously. He asked himself whether these people who were opposing him with so much determination might not, after all, be in the right? Had he not made a mistake in resolving that he would not leave Oxbury? Were not the motives which had actuated him in making that resolve unworthy of one holding the office he held? and had he not been deceiving himself as to those motives? Might it not be that he, like hundreds more, had mistaken his vocation? Might he not have been under

a delusion when he believed he had received "a call," not only to the ministry, but to this particular sphere, in which to commence the exercise of his ministry? Would he be treated as he was treated, if he had really received such a call?

There was everything to dishearten him, no matter which aspect of his affairs he considered. The attendance at the chapel was miserably scanty, the empty pews far outnumbering the worshippers; and he knew that the people were thinking regretfully of the large congregation which had regularly assembled at Grange Street in Mr. Bathosley's time. Most of those hearers were now wandering about, some of them attending the Methodist Chapel, and others the Bethel Meeting House. Even among the handful of people who still attended his own ministrations, there were several, he knew, who disliked him. There was Albert Winstock, for example, who with his wife and his three children still attended Grange Street, and who lounged in his pew, and listened with a

supercilious air throughout the service. Then there was Copperfox. This wise-acre, who could neither read nor write, and whose knowledge of the Scriptures was not equal to that of the smallest boy in the Sunday school, would hold his cunning head on one side while Philip was preaching, and look meaningly round with those twinkling eyes of his, as who should say, "This is very poor—very poor indeed." Mrs. Copperfox would sit by her husband's side meanwhile, and look daggers at the young minister. As for the two deacons, their wishes had been expressed to him with sufficient explicitness for Philip to know they heartily wished him gone.

Then as to his own sermons, he knew that they were not equal to what they had been previous to his marriage. The miseries he had experienced since that event had unstrung and unmanned him. He felt he could not preach as he ought to preach. And what right had he to expect that he would ever regain his old

confidence? Ought he not rather to expect that, as his friends dropped away from him one by one, and the wrath and impatience of his opponents waxed fiercer week by week, he would at length become utterly prostrated, and unable to utter a word for very shame and despair?

It was clear that this was the result his opponents calculated upon. They evidently did not expect that he could by any possibility make his way against such a sea of troubles as now surrounded him. The Todds would not have deserted him otherwise. He remembered how the farmer's family had inveighed against Mr. Staggers' proceedings a few weeks ago; he remembered that letter which Johanna had sent him when he was at Davenstone, in which she had deplored the dissensions prevailing at Grange Street; and now she and all her belongings had gone over to the enemy, and probably would never enter the chapel again so long as he remained where he was. No; they would not have insulted and forsaken him as they had done

were it not deemed certain that he would only remain a very few days.

Meanwhile Mr. Staggers considered that the time had now arrived for a *coup d'état* wherewith to complete the minister's discomfiture. Accordingly, he was to be seen at this time hobbling with his stick in different directions, evidently bent upon an important object. Just as it is in the night-time that the beast of the forest steals forth in quest of his prey, so the druggist, who had kept within doors for some weeks past, was to be observed abroad, now a kind of Egyptian darkness was settling upon Grange Street ; and the neighbours, seeing this hoary tradesman creeping hither and hither, remarked to one another, " There is going to be trouble at the chapel; Mr. Staggers is on his legs again !" To get upon his legs, and when up to keep upon them, was with the venerable druggist a work of so much difficulty, by reason of the stiffness of his joints and the shakiness of his frame generally, that nothing but the pleasure of setting the church members by

the ears was supposed to be a sufficient inducement for him to make the effort. The present was indeed a golden opportunity, which he could not allow himself to let slip. In the churchyard path, one chill, hazy afternoon, he met Mr. Larberry.

"You are just the man I wanted to see," said Staggers, stopping him. "We are going to have a meeting at my house this evening, at eight o'clock; and we must have you with us."

"What's the meeting to be about?" inquired the ironmonger.

"Oh, this unhappy business at Grange street. We really must take some steps to bring about a better state of things."

"Well, yes; so we must," said Larberry. "Something ought to be done. There must be a change, for we are all sixes and sevens."

"Just so. Well, we are going to deliberate this evening. You must be aware that there is no hope of union and peace among us so long as this young man is here.

We must get rid of him. You will come, will you not?"

Larberry considered awhile within himself, endeavouring to balance the arguments for and against his acceptance of the trustee's invitation, and then he said :

"Yes; I will be with you if I possibly can."

The ironmonger did not hear the chuckle which escaped from Mr. Staggers when he had given this promise, or he might have re-considered the matter. To secure the presence of Larberry, who had been and still was Mr. Holland's most thoroughgoing supporter, had been the height of the druggist's ambition, and his exultation was very great at his success. In giving this promise, however, Larberry did not intend abandoning the cause of the young minister. It seemed to him at this moment that he could serve his cause best by being present at this meeting. For one thing, he believed that Mr. Holland could never out-live such a tempest as was about to burst upon him. There seemed hardly a doubt

but that the minister's enemies would triumph. The besiegers had demolished the walls and fortifications, so to speak, and the city must fall. The utmost that could be done was to secure honourable terms of surrender. The ironmonger also thought that he would be sure to hear something which might be of use to Mr. Holland, in case he meant after all to brave the worst ; for Larberry intended to communicate to him all that passed at the meeting.

As eight o'clock drew nigh, preparations were being made on a somewhat large scale in the sitting-room behind Mr. Staggers' shop. A numerous company was expected, and additional chairs were brought down from the drawing-room, and ranged in double rows around the council-chamber. On a large table in the middle of the room writing materials were placed, and at the head of the table an arm-chair for the chairman.

These arrangements completed, the company began to arrive. The first to appear was Amos Flint, the deacon's cousin. He

was a very short, stout, sallow-complexioned young man, of a meek aspect. He was shown into the empty room by Maria the housemaid; but he did not have to wait long in solitude, for in a few minutes Mr. Copperfox entered, accompanied by a youth named McGowan. The latter was a pugnacious Scotchman who was possessed of impenetrable self-conceit."

"What do you think of Mr. Holland now?" inquired Amos Flint of this youth.

"Why, this is what I think. We have got our feet upon his neck, and I say, tread him down; tread him down!"

"He is *in extremis*, without a doubt," said Amos, who was studious and classical; "and when he has left the town, he will never wish to see it again."

"That is to say, *if* he does leave it," said Copperfox slyly. "Do you think that's certain?"

"As certain as that I am standing here," replied Amos; and upon this six or seven other persons were shown in. These were followed by Larberry and the two deacons,

and last of all came the master of the house arm-in-arm with Albert Winstock.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Staggers, “I believe all are now here that have promised to attend. I beg to propose Mr. Flint as a fit and proper person to occupy the chair this evening.”

“No,” said Mr. Flint, interposing; “you are the master of the house, and also the oldest church member. I think you ought to preside.”

“On no account,” returned the druggist. “I have not the honour, gentlemen, to hold any office in the church. In its prosperous days I had that honour; but I will not enter into that subject. Mr. Flint is the senior deacon, and I hope will lend the whole weight of his office to our proceedings on this occasion.”

After a little pressing, Mr. Flint was duly installed in the chair.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Staggers, whose manner was grave and even solemn, “you are aware that our object in assembling this evening is to take decided measures in

relation to Mr. Holland. That young man, in settling among us, acted contrary to the advice which I and also several other friends had given him. He has since then married a lady belonging to the Established Church, and you are all acquainted with the peculiar circumstances connected with that marriage. The present deplorable condition of our community I need not dwell upon. Suffice it to say that any prospect of peace and union so long as he remains here is utterly out of the question. What then are we to do? It has been suggested that 'a requisition' should be sent to him. That suggestion is, I think, a good one, and we cannot do better than adopt it. I have here," he continued, taking a large sheet of paper from the table, "a draft of a requisition which I have drawn up, and which I will read to you.

“ ‘ The undersigned Church Members
and Seatholders, to the Rev. Philip
Holland, Minister, etc., etc.

“ ‘ Considering you quite unsuited for

the position you now hold, and that you have not the slightest prospect of success in this town, we hereby require you to resign your office immediately.' ”

“ I wouldn't make the demand quite so peremptory, Mr. Staggers,” said the chairman.

Here Larberry got upon his legs and spoke. The ironmonger had been very uncomfortable ever since he entered the room, for he felt that he had placed himself in a false position. He heartily wished he had declined the trustee's invitation, as others of Mr. Holland's friends had done, and that he had shown his disapproval of the steps that were being taken. It was too late now, however. “ Here I am alone among them,” he had said to himself, “ and I cannot prevent them carrying out their plans.”

“ Mr. Chairman and friends,” he said, “ I don't like hitting a man when he is down, but as a requisition is to be sent, I think the one just read by Mr. Staggers

needs a good deal of alteration. I quite concur in Mr. Flint's opinion that it is too peremptory. Can't there be a little kindness and sympathy put into it? We surely needn't express our wishes with so much severity and harshness."

"Perhaps I ought to tell the meeting," said Amos Flint, "that it was I who suggested in the first instance that a requisition should be sent. The one just read, however, is not exactly worded to my mind. I think we had better draw up another, framed in a more courteous spirit, and it would be equally effective."

This seemed to be the general opinion. Mr. Staggers gave way, and in a few minutes another manifesto was prepared and read to the meeting by Amos Flint, which satisfied them all, Larberry included.

"And now for the signatures, gentlemen," said Mr. Staggers. "I think the requisition had better be signed by each and all of us now present this evening, and afterwards the document can be taken

round by some one to the houses of the friends for their signatures."

"Yes, that will be the best course," said Amos Flint. "Who will sign first? The chairman, I suppose?"

"No," replied that functionary; "I would rather not take the lead, if you will excuse me."

"Then Mr. Staggers must," said Amos.

"No—I do not wish to be prominent in the matter. Besides, you have thought fit not to accept the requisition I had drawn up. This is Mr. Amos Flint's requisition, and it would be well that he should head the signatures."

"I must beg to be excused," said Amos.

"The two deacons ought to sign first, I think," said Albert Winstock.

"Then I say No," said Mr. Flint.

"So say I," said Mr. Gloss.

"Does no one, then, covet this distinction?" said Mr. Staggers. "Winstock, will you lead us?"

"No, thank you; I am not a church-member."

In this emergency, when a *fiasco* seemed imminent for want of a leader, a suggestion was made by Larberry.

"Let us make a round robin of it," said he.

"We can't do that, because we hope a great number of people will append their names, and if so, the signatures will occupy several sheets," said the chairman with decision.

"Then what shall we do?" asked his cousin Amos, in a kind of desperation.

"I don't know I'm sure," replied the chairman. "Will some gentleman kindly come forward?"

No answer.

"You'd better let us make it a round robin," pleaded Larberry.

"That will not do at all," replied the immovable chairman. "Please to come forward, some one, for time passes."

Still there was no response, and the men looked at each other with a foolish indecision that was comical to behold.

"Well, then, since you are all so back-

ward in the matter, I don't mind signing first myself, if it's agreeable."

To the astonishment of all the company, these words proceeded from Larberry, who had risen from his seat in a state of considerable excitement.

"I can see," he continued, "that you wonder I should make the offer, but I mean it. I am here, you know, as Mr. Holland's friend; and for all that I am willing, I say, to put down my name at the head of the list. I wish to state, however, that in case Mr. Holland decides to remain, I shall stand by him and help him all I can."

With that he came forward, took the pen in his hand—which trembled a little as he did so—and signed his name to the document. The others looked on with delight, for this unexpected act of Larberry's not only relieved them of a difficulty, but would probably secure a far larger number of signatures for the requisition, inasmuch as many of Mr. Holland's adherents would be induced to follow such

a leader as the ironmonger, whose attachment to the minister no one doubted. Mr. Staggers smiled somewhat sarcastically, for he knew that Larberry acted very much upon impulse, and he believed the impetuous ironmonger had come to the fore on this occasion merely to gratify his excessive vanity.

Larberry's signature having been appended, there was very little difficulty about the rest, and in a few minutes the requisition had been signed by every one of the conclave.

"It is desirable, gentlemen," said Mr. Staggers, when that business had been despatched, and he and his co-signatories had heaved a sigh of relief at its completion, "it is desirable that two or three of us should be engaged in rotation in the work of obtaining further signatures to this paper. My family will keep it a week for that purpose, with your permission. Perhaps Mr. Amos Flint will take it next?"

Amos considered awhile before he replied. He was thinking whether, if he

undertook this work, it would interfere with his pilgrimages to Wickle. He had but little spare time, for his business occupied him early and late, and when he could snatch two or three hours in the evening he had always devoted them to Mary Gray. And there was another question—would Mary like his being engaged in such a work as this? He was not long in coming to a decision upon these points, for in two or three moments he lifted his head and replied :

“ Yes—I will take it next.”

“ Thank you,” said Mr. Staggers ; and thus this memorable meeting came to an end.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HARD GALLOP.

TALKING pleasantly to Mr. Peake (the curate), in the vestry of the parish church, the Rector of Oxbury drew on his hood over his surplice just previous to the commencement of public worship, when the door opened and the two churchwardens came in. Mr. Maxforth was accustomed in their company to ask a blessing on the day every Sunday morning; and now he and the curate and the two lay officials kneeled down together reverently. The Rector read the usual collects, and then, to the surprise of the listeners, he ventured this morning on an extemporaneous prayer, asking the Almighty to afford His gracious

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help that day to all ministers whatsoever who were labouring under special trials and difficulties. Although they were struck with the subdued fervour with which he spoke, perhaps none of the three auditors divined the secret reference in Mr. Maxforth's mind to the schismatical fellow-worker in Grange Street. Yet such a reference was distinctly made, and doubtless the prayer was heard in heaven, and answered. There were moist eyes when they all rose ; and when the "organ voluntary" began, and the choristers were seen to file past the opened door, they all went slowly out, and took their several places in the church. Mr. Peake read the prayers, and the Rector preached. He told them about One, who, though He was rich, yet for their sakes became poor ; and in that crowded congregation there were few persons but were conscious that the soul of their spiritual guide was filled with an unusual emotion. Mr. Maxforth was accompanied home by his uncle and the curate, the latter going in with them as usual to an

early dinner at the Rectory. The one thought in the Rector's mind that morning had been that it was quite time for him to begin to practise self-denial. He had been too happy, too fortunate ; had been blessed with too many comforts. He ought to make some sacrifices for others, whose heads were bowed down with misery and despair. Mr. Maxforth had never been a selfish man, but on the contrary, most liberal and benevolent, consulting his own ease and welfare but little or not at all. Yet it seemed to him that day that he had done nothing for his fellow-creatures. He had been a much-favoured man. The Rector's disposition was conducive to happiness. He was good-tempered and amiable, and not too ambitious. Then again, he had a private fortune, which, though not great, was sufficient for his wants. As a bachelor, whose domestic affairs were admirably managed by a respectable housekeeper—he was free from care and worry ; whilst in the parish, his active curate, excellent churchwardens, and a staff of willing workers,

rendered the discharge of his official duties easy and delightful. Now all these advantages he had hitherto regarded as matters of course ; but of late, the occurrences at Grange Street, with the details of which he had in some way or other become acquainted, had presented themselves to his mind as such a vivid contrast to his own way of life that he had become possessed of a deep compassion for Mr. Holland and a new sense of his own responsibilities. In what way could he help the minister ? Let not the reader suppose that Mr. Maxforth is about to be presented in these pages as exercising an influence or using arguments whereby a schismatical teacher is brought over to the Established Church. We will candidly state at once that the Rector is not destined to come in contact with Mr. Holland again in Oxbury, or in any way to act on his career. But the recent proceedings at Mr. Staggers' house, the drawing up of the requisition, and the active canvas for signatures now progressing—these matters

had all been brought within the Rector's knowledge ; and the treatment to which his dissenting fellow-worker was being subjected—opposite in every way to what he had always experienced in his own person, made a great impression upon his mind ; and again he asked himself—In what way could he help the minister ? This question he turned over and over in his thoughts, looking at it continually in the light of that text he had taken in the morning regarding Him, who, “though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.” Surely he could help him in temporal things ? His reflections were interrupted by a remark made by Mr. Hartleby.

“I saw the name Edward Flint over a grocer's shop as we came along High Street this morning. Is that the Mr. Flint who is deacon at Grange Street chapel ?”

“Yes,” replied the Rector, peeling an orange, “that is the deacon's place of business.”

“What kind of man is he in private life?” asked Mr. Hartleby.

“I believe he is an upright man,” replied the Rector. “His integrity may be relied upon; but he is somewhat fanatical in religious matters.”

“His influence is very powerful at Grange Street, I suppose?”

“Yes; he is virtually supreme there. Mr. Gloss follows his lead, and between them they rule the church members.”

“And they rule the minister as well, I presume,” said Mr. Hartleby, smiling.

“It would appear so; I fancy he has to obey their behests in most things.”

“You would not like to be in his place, Clement,” remarked his uncle. “You have but one bishop to obey; Mr. Holland has about a dozen altogether, including Mr. Copperfox, Mr. Staggers and the rest.”

“My bishop is a *gentleman*, too,” returned the Rector; “I can’t say as much for the rulers at Grange Street.”

“It is absurd,” said Mr. Hartleby, “that men of that kind should have the power the

dissenting system gives them—men who are not amenable to public opinion as your bishop is—who in fact despise public opinion, calling it ‘the spirit of the world,’ and whose ecclesiastical proceedings are done in secret. It is a system which works much mischief, in my opinion.”

“Any way, I think their minister is to be pitied,” remarked Mr. Maxforth.

“He is indeed,” assented his uncle.

During that and several succeeding days, the Rector thought much upon a scheme he was elaborating to relieve Mr. Holland’s temporal wants. It was most essential that whatever help he gave him should be afforded by stealth. It would never do to allow the minister even to suspect that he was receiving any pecuniary assistance from him. On several grounds that possibility must be most carefully guarded against. He laughed softly to himself one day as he was busy in his own room, packing a number of good things into a large hamper. No one should ever fathom the mystery! He enjoyed his work immensely as he thrust

in one article after another—two or three pots of jam, a couple of trussed fowls, a plum-cake, a lot of apples and many other eatables. Then he carefully corded the hamper, laughing quietly to himself all the time, and in due course it found its way to the shop of a baker and confectioner in Bridge Street. Hence it was conveyed to the chapel-house by the baker and confectioner, who stated to the amazed minister and his wife that he did not know and could not tell who it was that had sent the present. He had been instructed to leave it there—it was no mistake—name and direction were on the hamper—he could not imagine whose handwriting it was. All he could say was that the empty hamper must be returned to his shop, there to remain till called for! The reader may be told that to this day Mr. Holland does not know and has never suspected where that hamper came from.

It happened that a few days afterwards Reuben Crock was working in the Rector's garden, when it transpired that the minister

was in a state of great poverty. About eleven shillings a week was all he and his wife had to live upon. The disaffected had shown their displeasure by declining to pay their pew-rents, and the small revenue arising from the chapel property had not as yet found its way from the hands of Mr. Staggers. There was semi-starvation at the chapel-house, therefore ; but great delight had been experienced at the receipt of a hamper from some unknown friend. Being subsequently informed that the kind donor was generally supposed to be Silas Winstock, the Rector felt considerable satisfaction at the success of his scheme. Now also he registered a vow that henceforth he would look well to the temporal interests of the minister. Out of his own abundance he would dispense without stint. Why should he not do so, provided he could secure himself against discovery ? He was a bachelor, with no encumbrances ; and a bachelor he was likely to remain. To do good was the only luxury in which he could hope to indulge. He had once

looked forward to the time when he could take to himself a wife, but he had no such expectation now. The one woman whom he would like to marry it would be little short of madness to think of. He must endeavour to forget her. He had seen Miss Vaveley but twice, and on those occasions but for a few minutes, when they had discoursed upon ordinary topics ; and he had not betrayed his feelings by word or look. He had not the least right to suppose that she felt any affection for him. Probably she was already engaged to be married. How foolish he had been to imagine it was possible for her to come to Oxbury as mistress of the Rectory, when her sister was the wife of Mr. Holland ! What would his parishioners say ? The alliance would certainly not be popular with them. He might safely calculate upon their dissatisfaction. Moreover the present complications at Grange Street would thereby be materially increased and multiplied. In short, nothing could be more imprudent than such a marriage, and the

best thing to do was to try to banish the recollection of those interviews at the chapel-house, and to go on his way as though they had never taken place. It was true Miss Vaveley was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and her voice the sweetest he had ever heard. It was true also that he had discovered in her—or at least *thought* he had discovered—those qualities which elsewhere he had always looked for in vain, and which he had ever regarded as indispensable to his happiness. Under existing circumstances it would be extreme folly and rashness to think seriously of such an alliance.

The Rector mounted his horse and rode that day to Poppleton Hall, where he had luncheon with the squire. The squire's two daughters were very agreeable girls, and either of them would probably have accepted the hand of Mr. Maxforth if he had made her the offer. As he encountered the bright eyes of Emily to-day it occurred to him that if she were at the head of his table at the Rectory there was not a soul in

Oxbury or anywhere else but would applaud him, and declare that he had made a wise choice. And he himself now admitted that the choice might not prove unwise. She was of his own rank, she was loving and amiable, and her tastes and pursuits were such as were becoming in a clergyman's wife. The Rector was somewhat more attentive to her that afternoon, therefore; and when he remounted his horse and rode away he declared in his own mind that it would be far more prudent on his part to seek a wife at Poppleton Hall than to cherish those mad fancies regarding Miss Vaveley.

He took a hard gallop on the moor near the village of Wickle, and then rode down a lane past Farmer Gray's house. Mary Gray and her lover were talking together under an apple-tree as he went by, but were too intent upon their billing and cooing to notice him. "How happy they look!" thought Mr. Maxforth; and then he wondered whether, supposing he were to marry, he would ever have cause to regret the

choice he had made? Would his marriage make an unpleasant commotion among his parishioners, as another marriage he knew of had done at Grange Street? Certainly if Miss Vaveley were to be brought to the Rectory as its mistress there would be a commotion, though, of course, he had no reason to fear such a display of animosity as the Dissenters had shown. His parishioners would assuredly think he had married beneath him; but, nevertheless, they would never dream that they were entitled to interfere in his domestic concerns, or to persecute his wife. But had he not already given up all thought of such an alliance? Had he not told himself that he must endeavour to forget the fair stranger who had taken his heart captive? If, on the other hand, Emily Cornford consented to be his, he had no need to fear men's frowns or rebukes. He would receive congratulations in abundance, and a comfortable and honourable future was before him. It was time then to take a decided course. His object should be to obtain a bride from the

Hall, if possible, and thus to secure the approbation of his parishioners and his own success as a clergyman.

He had ridden far that day, and when at length he reached home his dinner had long been waiting. There were several letters upon the table. On opening one of them he found it was from a clergyman in Scamborough, asking him to come and preach two special sermons for him in January.

"I cannot refuse such an old friend as Tom Praxton," he thought, as he folded up the letter. "Besides it will be a pleasant change;" and then he remembered that Seftwick, the seaside village to which Mrs. Vaveley and her daughter had gone, was only five or six miles from Scamborough. After dinner he went into the library, and wrote a reply, stating that he would come at the date named.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I WOULD DO SO, BY ALL MEANS."

LARBERRY, when he quitted the trustee's house on the night of the conference, felt very well satisfied with his own share in the proceedings, and did not doubt that he had left a favourable impression upon the minds of the company. Moreover, he was now inclined to believe that a mark of distinction had been conferred upon him in having been invited to the meeting. It had been a great occasion. These people who spoke of Mr. Holland's supporters in terms of patronage and pity, seemed in a fair way to carry everything before them. Their names would probably be treasured in the archives of Grange Street as the saviours

of the community, and the requisition they sent forth regarded as the sword wherewith the Gordian knot of its difficulties had been cut. How great the honour, then, of appearing at the head and front of that noble band ! What cause for rejoicing, that his, Larberry's, name occupied so conspicuous a position in a manifesto destined to accomplish such important results ! The ironmonger hurried home to acquaint his wife with the transactions of the evening, not doubting that she would be highly gratified by his promptitude and courage in having been the first to sign the document. Reserving this brilliant and felicitous deed as the crowning point of his narrative, he began by telling Mrs. Larberry the names of those who had been present, and continued his account up to the critical moment when the first signature was asked for.

"So it went on," said he complacently ; "none of them wanted to be first ; and perhaps they were afraid to sign it."

"Then I hope it all came to nothing," said his wife.

"Oh dear no; I signed first myself, and then all the rest followed readily enough."

"You! *You* signed first? Well; I never heard such a thing in my life. Why, what could you have been thinking of? If it had been me, I would have cut my right hand off, sooner than I'd have done such a thing."

"But, my dear, somebody must be first."

"Then let them that got it all up—let them that are the ringleaders—let Amos Flint or Mr. Staggers be first. I wouldn't have done their dirty work for them."

Larberry now saw that there was to be no peace for him at home.

"Didn't you declare to me," continued the wife of his bosom, "before you started for the meeting, that you wouldn't be drawn into anything against the minister? What will people call you?—weathercock—turn-coat! What will Mr. Holland think of you?"

"I shall call and explain it all to him," said Larberry, in a low voice.

"A pretty explanation you'll make of it.

I should never dare to look him in the face again if I had done such a thing. It was the greatest mistake you ever made. I would never have deserted my minister."

"My dear, I have not deserted him."

"Stuff and nonsense !"

"I told them I should stand by him, if he remained."

"Yes ; and they laughed at you for saying it, I'll be bound. But there—you will be sorry for this night's work to the latest day of your life."

One afternoon, soon after this conversation, as Larberry, who had just finished his tea, was about to start for the shop, a loud knocking was heard at the front door of the cottage, and on its being opened by the ironmonger's wife, Jael Staggers stood revealed. Under ordinary circumstances this young lady would not have deigned to notice so lowly a person as Mrs. Larberry, had they happened to meet in the street ; but on this occasion she was most gracious and friendly. Larberry surmised what it was that had procured for them the honour of this visit,

and in a very few minutes his suspicions were proved correct. Miss Staggers produced a roll of paper from beneath the folds of her apparel, and opening it said :

"I have brought the requisition for you to sign, Mrs. Larberry ;" and she placed the document upon the table.

"How many signatures have you obtained ?" inquired Larberry, glancing over the paper as he spoke.

"Oh, I have met with such great success ! No one that I have waited upon has given me a refusal, and I have obtained twenty names already."

"So I see," said the ironmonger, with his eyes fixed upon the manifesto. He did not want his wife to sign it, and Mrs. Larberry for her part was quite resolved not to do so.

"I have done you good service myself by signing it, haven't I ?" said Larberry, addressing the visitor.

"Yes ; and we are greatly obliged."

"You can dispense with my wife's name, I think," he added. "One signature from our family is sufficient——"

"Quite sufficient, I should say," remarked Mrs. Larberry.

"Very well—just as you please," said Miss Staggers resignedly, as she folded up the document.

"You see, there is no need that my wife's name should appear."

"Oh no; certainly not, if you don't wish it," said Miss Staggers. "We have fixed who the new minister is to be when Mr. Holland has gone," she continued, as she moved towards the door; "at least, papa has a young man in his mind. He has named it to several friends, and the young man is going to be invited for three weeks on trial."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Larberry; "what is his name, if I may make so bold?"

"His name is Basswick." And with that Miss Staggers took her leave.

It was with some little fear and trembling that Larberry, when his work was done that night, made his way to the minister's house, in order, as he told his wife, to set

his, Larberry's, conduct before him in the proper light. He thought it probable that Mr. Holland was expecting him, and such indeed was the case. Certain reports had reached the minister's ears, and he wanted to get information respecting the proceedings at Mr. Staggers' house from some one who had been there. When the ironmonger was shown into the sitting-room, Mr. Holland and Kate gave him their hands, and the salutations were of the usual warm and hearty character. Kate was then moving towards the door, but Larberry said :

"Pray do not leave the room, Mrs. Holland. What I have to say to Mr. Holland is for your ear also."

She then took her seat upon the couch close by her husband, and the young couple waited in silence for Larberry to begin. The ironmonger was manifestly nervous and embarrassed, as if conscious that he had placed himself in a false position by that unlucky signature.

"Well, I have come to tell you," he said,

shaking himself, in order to get rid of his nervousness, "I have come to tell you, Mr. Holland, about the meeting at Mr. Staggers' house last Tuesday."

The minister bowed.

"He asked me to be there, and I went," continued Larberry. "I went," he added with emphasis, "*as your friend.*"

Mr. Holland bowed again, still silent and attentive.

"I thought it would be just as well to see with my own eyes, and hear with my own ears, what was going on," said the ironmonger apologetically.

"How many were present, do you think?" said the minister.

"I didn't count them, but there was a large number; the room was full."

"Was Mr. Flint there?"

"He was."

"And Mr. Gloss?"

"Yes."

"And did Mr. Staggers preside?"

"No; the chair was taken by Mr. Flint."

"And there was a great deal of talking

at the meeting, no doubt," said the minister.

"Did anything particular take place?"

"Well, yes; a requisition was drawn up."

"Oh! there was a requisition drawn up, was there? How many signed it?"

"Every one," said Larberry laconically.

"Every one! Surely you didn't sign it yourself!"

"Yes, I did," said the ironmonger, who thought he might as well make a clean breast of it at once. "In fact, my name stands at the top of the list."

"Then I have reason to say, 'Save me from my friends.' Wasn't that unwise and unfriendly on your part?"

"I did it," said Larberry, "because I felt convinced you could never face them. No man living could possibly face them. You have no idea how determined they are. It would kill me to have to stand up in the pulpit under such circumstances as these that surround you now."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Holland, "you must permit me to say you were hasty.

On reflection, I think you must see that you ought not to have done it."

"I have told you my reason," said the ironmonger. "I gave them to understand that my feelings towards you have not altered in the least; and I believed I was consulting your interests in the matter. It was their desire that I should come and acquaint you with the result of the meeting."

"We were expecting you," said the minister.

"You will receive the requisition," continued Larberry, "on the twenty-fourth of this month. Miss Staggers, Amos Flint, and one or two others, are now taking it round among the friends, to obtain their signatures to it; but it will be sent in to you on that day. You are to send in your reply to Mr. Flint on or before the thirtieth. Mr. Staggers wishes to have your answer by that date, because they have decided who the new minister is to be, and are desirous that the invitation should be sent to him in the course of the next month."

"Mr. Flint shall have my answer on the day you have mentioned," said Mr. Holland, with a quiet smile.

"Was Mr. Crock at the meeting, Mr. Larberry?" said Kate, after a long pause.

"No, Mrs. Holland, he was not. He had been invited, but declined to go."

"I am glad of that," said Kate.

"Or Mr. Garrel—was he there?" said the minister, speaking of a church-member of good standing, who had hitherto kept himself aloof from both the contending parties, and was supposed to regard the strife with feelings of indifference as to which side obtained the mastery. Mr. Holland asked the question with some eagerness.

"Mr. Garrel was not there either," replied the ironmonger. "They tried hard to get him, but he told them he would have nothing to do with them and their grumbings. 'They had gone too far,' he said, and 'he thought they must be mad.'"

"I think so too," said Kate.

"Besides Mr. Garrel and Mr. Crock,

there were several, I know, who declined to attend the meeting," said the iron-monger.

"Well now, look here, Mr. Larberry," said the minister warmly, "I hardly need point out to you that that meeting was irregular in every way. It was not a church-meeting ; it was not a public meeting at all. The two deacons ought not to have countenanced it by their presence. They must have known that its decisions could have no authority."

"To be sure they must," said Larberry, whose indignation against the minister's enemies was waxing fierce. "They ought to have known better ! A mere hole-and-corner meeting !"

"Just so."

"It is shameful," said Larberry. "I told them I would stand by you, if you make up your mind to stay ; and *I will*. Do not give up, Mr. Holland." And he proceeded to remind the minister that there were young people growing up at Grange Street to replace those who were removing,

and that to this new community this warfare would be little else than matter of history. Even he did not dare to hint that there was the slightest hope of the present generation of malcontents.

"I should like," said Mr. Holland, "to hold a consultation with those who support me, as to what is the best course to take in this emergency."

"Yes, it would be desirable, sir," said Larberry.

"I propose, then, to call a meeting of my friends, by private invitation. What do you say, dear?"

"I would do so, by all means," said Kate.

"And I hope you will find you have a good number of supporters, sir," said Larberry.

"Had we better meet here, in my house, do you think?" said the minister.

"Yes, if you think well," replied the ironmonger; "but if things turn out as I hope they will, I fancy you have no room in the house large enough to hold them."

My house would afford better accommodation. Shall we say my house?"

"Thank you. When shall the meeting take place—on Monday week?"

"Yes, Monday week will suit very well."

"And may I leave the work of inviting them entirely in your hands?" asked the minister.

"I'll see to that with great pleasure, if you wish it," said Larberry.

"I do wish it, and it will be best so. Good-night."

CHAPTER XV.

A MEMORABLE SUNDAY.

IT was Larberry's practice to write an account in private of every incident which he considered important, relative to the affairs of Grange Street chapel, with a view to the publication of his narrative in the *Oxbury Weekly Trumpet*. Every Sunday night, also, on returning home from the evening service, the ironmonger would record upon paper his estimate of the sermons Mr. Holland had been preaching during the day. When the discourses had been of an indifferent quality his narration would be very brief; but if they had produced a deep impression upon his mind, and moved or excited him, his account of them would

occupy him for several hours, and would be exceedingly diffuse.

On the night of the Sunday following his interview with the minister, Larberry sat up writing until an unusually late hour, from which circumstance his wife and family knew that he considered *that* had been an extraordinary day. We will present to the reader, in his own words, the narrative which cost the ironmonger so much time and labour on that occasion.

“Sunday Night, Oct. 27th, 187—.

“This has been a day never to be forgotten. May it prove the first of many, very many, good days yet to come!

“When I and my dear wife entered the chapel this morning we both felt sad and despondent—myself more especially so. One reason of this was that I had been hearing throughout the week so many petty complaints against our minister and his wife—so many foolish, bigoted observations with reference to his recent marriage, which continues to be the all-absorbing topic, and

on account of which a great many have turned against him. Another reason was because I had only been able to obtain two or three promises for the meeting which is to take place in my house to-morrow se'nnight, although I had been trying my utmost, as I promised Mr. Holland I would do. And then, the vacant pews—how dreary they looked! Mr. Staggers and his family all absent! Amos Flint absent! Ah! what mischief that smooth-tongued young man is making! May pure-minded Mary Gray never be cozened into marrying him. (There is an honest young farmer after her, I am told. I wish *him* success.)

“But it was the sight of Todd's empty pew that affected me most as I took my seat in the chapel. There were scores of vacant places around me, but when I looked at *that* it cut me to the heart to think how badly the Todds have behaved. There had been no object in the building more familiar than the broad, sturdy back of Mr. Todd right in front of me. How well I remember his attitude of rapt attention to

the minister whom he now reviles without a cause ! I have not forgotten his manner of leaning over the back of his seat at the close of the services, and whispering in my ear that the sermon was ‘capital,’ and Mr. Holland was ‘just the man for Oxbury.’ If he had only heard the discourse this morning ! But no ; on account of our minister’s marriage he and his family have gone quite away ; at least, if it is not *that*, I know not what is the cause of their leaving. They assign so many different reasons at various times, and shift their ground of attack so often, that I suspect they have no valid excuse at all. Methinks they did protest too much at first. Their love was too hot to last.

“ But the two girls have behaved the worst. My wife was talking with Dame Crock about them as we were on our way to chapel. It was monstrous to go and insult our minister in his own house, without the slightest provocation, and at a time when his troubles were so great. They deserved to have been turned neck-and-

crop out of doors. I hear that they go about boasting of the transaction, which is still more disgraceful. But there are plenty to applaud them, whereas we who uphold Mr. Holland are a feeble band, despised of all men.

“ Then I thought of the requisition, and deeply regretted that I had ever signed it, since by so doing I have unintentionally done our minister a serious injury. I now wish that I could prevent their sending the memorial to him, for it is a grievous indignity to offer one’s pastor, and the humiliation attached to the receiving of it must be almost too much for human endurance. But if it killed him, or drove him mad, they would send it. They will leave no stone unturned in order to get rid of him. ‘What did he come here for?’ they say. ‘We didn’t want him.’ ‘Let him go back to the place he came from.’ And they have made up their minds to starve him into compliance with their demand, if all other means fail. They say Mr. Staggers, as acting trustee, can prevent his

having any money from the endowment; and if they also refuse to pay their seat-rents the minister will have nothing but what two or three of us can raise for him, which, of course, will be inadequate for his support. Having so many arrows in their quiver, therefore, they are confident that they will secure their object.

“While these thoughts were passing through my mind Mr. Holland ascended the pulpit. I now began to wonder how he would get through the service, and what kind of discourse he would give us. I did not expect he would make any allusion to passing events connected with himself, for that is not his practice; and his manners are so mild, and equable, and unassuming, both out of and in the pulpit, that I did not dream of there being any display of temper or passion. I confess I expected he would utterly break down. Under the happiest conditions it is not, I think, easy to preach a really good sermon; and considering the terrible ordeal through which he is passing, I judged it an impossibility this morning.

“ He began very quietly, not the slightest agitation being apparent during what we call the introductory service. Every ear was strained to detect a tremor in the inflections of his voice, but it was firm and assured ; and by the time he had finished his prayer I had, in some subtle, mysterious way, become aware that he was going to startle and rouse us all. A breathless silence reigned throughout the chapel ; every one seemed to feel that a momentous crisis had come.

“ I gave a rapid glance around me. The Crocks, old Silas Winstock, and Mr. Garrel, were, I was sure, the minister’s well-wishers, and the expression of sympathy I saw at this moment upon each of their faces could not possibly be mistaken. But there were many, whose eyes I then saw fastened on the preacher, who were by no means prepared to declare for him, simply because they were dismayed and confounded by the strength of the opposite party. Some, too, were at this moment waiting for their path to be pointed out to

them. These were desirous of doing what was right, but were sorely perplexed by their incertitude as to what would be right at this juncture. In the breasts of others lurked, I fear, a malicious hope that Mr. Holland might be covered with confusion ; that he would find himself unable to proceed, and on bringing the service to an abrupt termination, would see the necessity of resigning his charge. But now he announced his text : ‘ Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain ? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain : and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house ; his hands shall also finish it ; and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you.’

“The energy with which Mr. Holland read those words prepared me and every one else for what was coming in the sermon; and as he proceeded to deduce from the narrative one principle after another, we had no difficulty in inwardly applying each of them to the trying circumstances through which he is passing. When in forcible language he showed that God establishes the glory and splendour of the church, not instantaneously, but by degrees, I thought with indignation of the impatience and the rigour which our people have displayed towards him, because, forsooth, the commencement of his career among them was a ‘day of small things,’ and how shamefully they had violated the Christian code in not allowing him either time or opportunity to make ‘full proof of his ministry.’ When he reminded us that God often permits mountains of opposition to rise in the way of the building of the church, and mentioned His reasons for so doing, my heart bled within me as I reflected that sedition and slander were

doing their very worst to hinder the good work in that very building. When with a triumphant shout he declared that no mountain of opposition can stand before Zerubbabel, or God's people, it stirred my soul like the blast of a trumpet to see him animated with so much courage and confidence, as if he were a general rallying his scattered forces for a victorious charge. And when he urged us not to forget that, although instruments are used, the power which effects these results is *divine* power, how evident it was to me that his humility is not assumed but genuine, and that he has committed his cause to the hand of God!

“ From first to last, however, there was not a single word spoken that in my judgment was aimed offensively at any individual *in* the building, *or out of it*. I believe that nothing could possibly induce Mr. Holland to stoop to personalities or to abuse of those who have ill-treated him. Nevertheless, it was with marvellous energy that he exclaimed: ‘ Let there be no traitors in the camp. Let all who

mean to have a hand in the building of the temple exercise faith, watchfulness, and courage; the headstone will then be laid with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." After a few closing words he sat down, and in a few minutes the service came to an end.

" 'This man will beat them all yet,' said old Silas Winstock to me, as we were leaving the chapel together.

" 'I hope so,' was my reply.

" 'It was not a bad discourse,' said he. 'Let him preach grace and election, and he will do; but he mustn't mix up free-will with it. And as for their opposition, that will do him no harm; it will brace him up, and make a man of him.'

" 'He isn't afraid of them, any way,' said I; 'do you think he is?'

" 'No; he'll snap his fingers at their requisition, when he gets it. I couldn't have believed he had so much pluck in him.'

" And old Silas was not the only one who 'couldn't have believed it.' It was his

boldness that had surprised us all, more than anything else in the minister's sermon. Usually his manner is very subdued; hence his enemies have derived the impression that he is timid, and wanting in *verve*, and this delusion has prompted much of their insolent and contemptuous behaviour towards him. And taking into account the stupendous difficulties that lie in his way, we have all condoled with and commiserated him; but none of us expected the display of fearlessness we have witnessed this morning.

“Our people are in a state of great excitement. Mr. Staggers' party tell us not to be too sure of victory, for there is a good deal of fighting to be done yet, which I can well believe. They also bid us take notice that signatures to the requisition are being obtained very rapidly, and that the cream of the church and congregation are all against us. What shall you do, they ask us, now these have withdrawn themselves and refuse assistance of a pecuniary kind? Without means, say they, how can

you meet your expenses, and keep your minister? To all such questions I reply—Our trust is in God. You are strong, and we are weak; you have an abundance of gold and silver, and we have none; yet in the end I trust we shall prevail, since our cause is a good and righteous one.”

Such was Larberry's account of a memorable Sunday at Grange Street. In the main it may be accepted as an accurate version, except that he has decidedly over-rated Mr. Holland's abilities as a preacher. The latter was neither better nor worse in that capacity than hundreds of ministers who meet with a fair amount of success in their calling, and who are not supposed even by their warmest admirers to be remarkably gifted. Whether the iron-monger's anticipations in respect of the final issue of the conflict were completely fulfilled in after days, will be seen in due time, if the reader is sufficiently interested in our story to peruse the pages that are yet to come. And if it should be thought that the writer

of this chronicle betrays too great a partiality for *the minister* in his account of the conflict, it is frankly conceded that we *do* hold the dissenting system to bear hardly, as a rule, upon men in his position ; but that nevertheless we are fully resolved to deal justly and fairly with all the parties concerned.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I DON'T SEE HOW HE CAN LIVE."

THE discourse respecting which the iron-monger wrote in such flattering terms, and of which a synopsis was given in the last chapter, certainly did make a deep impression, not only upon Larberry, but also upon others who happened to be in Grange Street Chapel on that memorable Sunday morning. Those who wished the minister gone, and who up to that time believed that the memorial had effectually taken away all the courage he had left, were now convinced that he meant to remain at his post, and brave the tempest that was about to burst upon him. Some little mortification naturally mingled with the surprise felt

by this portion of the community. But there were others who had always stood firm in their allegiance to Mr. Holland. The sermon had animated them with a new hope, and a fervent enthusiasm. They were no longer dismayed and confounded; they shared the fearlessness of their leader, and were prepared to do anything he might direct or recommend. Then, that class of hearers who had hitherto been in a state of perplexity and incertitude, waiting for their path to be pointed out to them, were now resolved to remain neutral and inactive no longer, but to give their entire support and countenance to the minister. Thus the discourse had borne fruit in many ways. Gifts, too, of various kinds now began to pour into the chapel-house. There was no mystery attached to most of these, for the donors brought them in person. The largest presents, however, were sent anonymously, and came from Mr. Maxforth. The recipients had no suspicion that they were indebted to the Rector, but believed they had to thank Mr. Larberry, Dame Crock,

and Silas Winstock. It is true these latter virtually denied all knowledge of such gifts, but nevertheless Mr. Holland and his wife adhered to their supposition, especially with regard to the corn merchant, whom they knew to be wealthy and kind-hearted, and who had bestowed many favours upon them without any disguise or concealment. Another friend who at this time began to show the minister much kindness was Roger Garrel. This person had hitherto been a neutral spectator of the conflict, but was now beginning to take an active part in the events which were happening at Grange Street. He carried on business at the "Crown Steam Brewery," to which a public-house was attached; and on account of his occupation was regarded as somewhat of a pariah—at least by the stricter members of the sect. Garrel himself had serious misgivings now and again as to the propriety of his calling, he being a professedly religious man; and he would at such times express a wish that he could abandon it altogether: at other times he would smile

at such scruples, and by a train of ingenious arguments would settle the question to his own entire satisfaction ; being greatly assisted to such a settlement by the fact that his business was beginning to flourish, and also by the circumstance that he had a large family to support.

A man named Garthwaite tenanted the public-house, and carried on its business, which was well-conducted, for the brewer had placed him under certain salutary restrictions. Roger Garrel in fact honestly endeavoured to bring his principles as a church-member to bear upon his occupation, and on the whole succeeded in the attempt rather better than might have been expected. Nevertheless we will candidly state our opinion, that it would have been better for Grange Street and its minister if the latter had been enabled to dispense with the brewer's active support. Garrel was a worthy man and will be a prominent figure in this history ; but Mr. Holland and the owner of a public-house were by the church-members naturally considered un-

suitable allies. Events will bring the two men very closely together, and the reader shall judge whether or not the minister displayed prudence and discretion in his dealings with the person who now steps forward as his champion and protector.

Several reasons had hitherto combined to withhold Garrel from active interference in the affairs of Grange Street. For one thing he had occupied but a secondary place while such men as Mr. Staggers and Albert Winstock had remained at the chapel. Moreover his business had kept him very much at home, and had absorbed almost all his thoughts. Then again, the nature of his calling, and the consciousness that it made him unpopular with a large section of the community, had kept him very quiet. Besides he had not been quite sure whether it was worth while to take either side in the conflict, since there were faults on both sides, and in any case the issue would speedily be decided without his assistance. And lastly, *he* also had been considerably roused and excited by the dis-

course above-mentioned, and was led by it to declare himself a warm adherent of the man who had therein stated his case so plainly, and had so earnestly appealed for support.

If any one had told Garrel that a clergyman of the Church of England, being less dependent on the whims and purse-strings of his congregation, could therefore preach the truth more fearlessly, and reprove, rebuke and exhort more faithfully than a dissenting minister was in a position to do, the brewer would have stoutly denied the proposition, and would have adduced the memorable discourse given in the last chapter as an illustration to the contrary. But Garrel did not know that that occasion was the exception which proves the rule. He did not know how often Mr. Holland had entered his pulpit in fear and trembling lest anything he might say would still further weaken his precarious hold upon his people. He did not reflect that the energy displayed by the preacher on that well-remembered morning was the energy of

despair—that it was like the energy of the wounded stag when he stands at bay. The brewer did not know all this. He only remembered how his soul had been stirred by that appeal, and how ardently he longed to join in the battle and to deal a few well-directed strokes at the enemy.

Garrel was something of a philosopher—a philosopher who loved an argument, but was never known to lose his temper. Many were the pet theories that he propounded with a closeness of reasoning which seemed to allow the antagonist no escape from his conclusions. Silas Winstock knew his power as a debater and controversialist. The old miller has taken many a long drive in his company, when they have discoursed for hours upon such themes as the fall of man, election, and free-will, final perseverance, and kindred topics. With Dame Crock also, and Larberry and Mr. Flint, the brewer frequently conversed upon similar subjects, for the Dissenters of Grange Street had deep convictions, and were possessed of consider-

able knowledge respecting points of doctrine and the science of theology in general. With all these persons, and with others besides, Garrel reasoned as a philosopher. Affable, sincere, and generous—the reader will find him more worthy of esteem than some whose acquaintance he has made, and he will understand why it was that the brewer began at this time to feel a keener interest in the affairs at Grange Street with which Mr. Holland was so intimately associated.

One day, as Garrel was superintending the operations of his men in the brewery, which stood at the back of his dwelling-house, the housemaid came across the yard to tell him that Mr. Flint was in the front sitting-room, and wished to speak to him.

“Ask him if he’ll be kind enough to step this way, into the brewhouse,” said Garrel, adding to himself, as the servant disappeared, “He won’t like the smell of the place, he being a teetotaller, but he must put up with it this time, for I can’t leave just now. Good-morning,” he said, extend-

ing his hand, and smiling blandly, as the deacon stepped over the threshold. "How are you?"

Mr. Flint's rueful countenance when he responded, and the grimaces with which he eyed the surrounding casks, were not unnoticed by the brewer, and afforded him much secret enjoyment.

"Mr. Garrel," said the deacon, "I didn't see you at our conference the other evening, at Mr. Stagers'."

"No; I am happy to say you didn't," replied the other, good-humouredly.

"But, at this crisis, ought you to keep aloof?" asked Mr. Flint.

The brewer took off his cap, surveyed it silently for a second or two, and then, as he replaced it upon his head, replied, with much urbanity :

"You are right, friend. I ought *not* to keep aloof, and I will do so no longer."

"Will you sign the requisition?"

"Never. Let me explain. My little business" (rapping a cask with his knuckles) "is increasing, and I have been so pressed

and driven, that on the week-day, I regret to say, I have not been able to give any thought to church affairs."

The deacon's countenance became more lugubrious than ever as Garrel made this explanation, but the latter proceeded in a cheerful tone :

"I am going to amend my ways. I mean to attend all the meetings now; *not* those that Mr. Staggers convenes, however—mark that, friend—but the regular and legitimate meetings at Grange Street. When I see how people are doing their best to ruin Mr. Holland I can be indifferent no longer, and I mean to do my very utmost to assist and encourage him."

"I don't think he ought to be encouraged," said Mr. Flint gloomily. "As there is a large majority against him he ought to consider it his duty to go."

"Not at all," said the brewer, with a suave but deprecatory motion of his arms. "Majorities, my friend, are oftener wrong than right, in all human affairs. It is the small minorities that usually have possession

of the truth, while the masses go astray. The condition of our church is an illustration in point."

"But, *his wife*," said the deacon; "the friends do not like her."

"It is their own fault, then," said Garrel. "They avoid and suspect her, and a great number of them expect of her more than they have any right to expect. They mistake the duties and obligations of a minister's wife altogether. Her place is in her own household, in my opinion. Besides, I happen to know that Mrs. Holland has manifested a sincere desire to be active among us, and that she has been snubbed for her pains."

"I am very sorry, if that is the case," said Mr. Flint coldly; "but still it is a state of things which one might naturally have expected. It is a pity Mr. Holland ever came here, as I have said over and over again."

"Nay, let us look on the bright side," said the brewer cheerily. "It may turn out otherwise, if we will only have faith.

What I regret is that those who invited the young man, and in a manner forced him to come, have not stood firm and true to him. It was the duty of all who were the means of getting him here to do so."

The deacon knew very well who they were to whom his interlocutor referred, but thought it wisest not to take up the cudgels on their behalf.

"We must accept facts as we find them, and act accordingly, however much we may deplore those facts," he said, in a hesitating manner, and taking refuge in an abstract proposition.

"Yes," said Garrel, "but *how* must we act? If they have wronged him, we must not do him another wrong to make things square and pleasant. Two wrongs can't make a right, you know, friend."

Mr. Flint saw that it was useless to continue the conversation; and as Larberry, the ironmonger, was at this moment observed coming up the yard, the deacon beat a hasty retreat. The new-comer, taking Garrel a short distance apart from

his men, who were at their work there, said to him, in a low tone :

"After all, we shall muster a large number, I find."

"That's right," replied the brewer, laughing. "You see what comes of having an active whipper-in, like you."

"You haven't been inviting *him*, have you?" said Larberry, pointing to the retreating figure of the deacon.

"Not I ; he wouldn't come if I did. We had just been arguing the matter as you came up."

"I suspected as much. There is no such thing as turning *him* round ; he is made of iron and adamant."

"Let me see," said Garrel, "this meeting of ours is to take place next Monday, isn't it?"

"Yes, and it is to be held at my house. I have got a lot of promises, some of them from what I may call representative men. There is Crock, for example ; he represents the piety there is among us—"

"And experience," suggested Garrel.

"Yes, and experience too ; he being a church-member of long standing. Then, besides ourselves, there are about fourteen others, all good men and true."

"I can see," said the brewer, "our rally will be a good one, except in one particular."

"What is that ?" said Larberry, in some surprise.

"Why, there will be nobody to represent the moneyed interest."

"True, there will not, unless it is yourself. You are about the best man among us, now Staggers, and Albert Winstock, and Todd, and the others have left."

Garrel laughed.

"I am only what I call a working brewer," said he, "just able to provide things honestly for my family ; but I tell you what, friend Larberry, such as I am, I mean to do my very best for the minister."

"So do I," said the ironmonger warmly. "I don't see how he can live, I'm sure. He only gets a few shillings now and then, as the deacons dole 'em out to him."

"That matter must be looked into," said Garrel.

"He has so little coming in," said the ironmonger confidentially, "that he would get into serious difficulties, only Mrs. Holland is a careful housewife and a good manager. Mrs. Crock and you and Silas Winstock have made them several little presents, and others have been sent anonymously, and I have done what *I* could; but I wonder how they manage to make both ends meet after all. But I must be off: I am going to hunt up several friends for the meeting. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, friend," said Garrel heartily; and so the two men parted.

Larberry was indeed indefatigable in the matter of this meeting. He might be met in the most out-of-the-way places, two or three miles from home, going to or coming from the house of some church-member or other, whose attendance he was desirous of securing. Of nights, he dreamed about it, and during the day he spent his strength and his time lavishly in the endeavour to

make it a respectable and numerous gathering. And yet there were people in Oxbury—people who knew how unstable the impetuous ironmonger had proved himself—who would say, “Wait a bit; he will cool down very soon, and before next Monday he will take the other side, and refuse to have them at his house.” His having been the first to sign the requisition, notwithstanding his protestations of ardent attachment to the minister, had caused even his best friends to lose faith in him. “A man who holds with the hare and runs with the hounds like that, ain’t to be trusted,” Dame Crock had said; and almost all the Grange Street people were of the dame’s opinion. Mr. Holland and his wife were notable exceptions. They thought that he *was* to be trusted, and when any one hinted to Kate that the meeting would “never come off—at least in Larberry’s house,” she would smile and say, “I think I understand him; and I have no fear.”

END OF VOL I.

